

CHARACTER DESIGN SPECIAL!

NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

OVER
200

ARTWORKS
& SKETCHES

+
**41 NEW PRO
ARTISTS**

• KUDAMAN • ARON ELEKES
• MARCUS WILLIAMS • YANG J
• HELENA BUTENKOVA
• JULIO CESAR • JON LAM
AND LOADS MORE INSIDE!

TAP FOR
TEXT-FREE
COVER!

FUTURE
ISSUE 230

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS

WAYFINDER

We catch up with **Joe Madureira** and his art team behind the upcoming role-playing game from Airship Syndicate

PLUS! INTERVIEWS WITH **BETSY BAUER**, **LUIS GADEA**, AND **KENNETH ANDERSON**

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Welcome to... NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS **ImagineFX**



While art can cover many genres and areas of focus, I'd suggest it's fair to say that character work makes up by far the largest proportion. With that in mind, we thought it high time to speak with top character artists from around the globe to share their work.

Over the course of this issue you'll discover a collection of stunning character art, in a multitude of styles and genres. And if you want something meatier to get your teeth into, then we have a feature on the concept art for the video game Wayfinder, as well as an insight into the art and mind of Kenneth Anderson, the wonderful artist behind some gorgeous work for younger fans. Not only that, we spoke to Betsy Bauer and Luis Gadea about their roles in the world of animation.

It always amazes me how much talent there is out there, and nothing is quite so exciting as when fresh new art hits my inbox. If you're an artist, or you know of one who you think deserves to be in the pages of ImagineFX, then please do email me and share your portfolios.

Rob

Editor
Rob.Redman@futurenet.com

EDITOR'S CHOICE Three of my top picks this month...



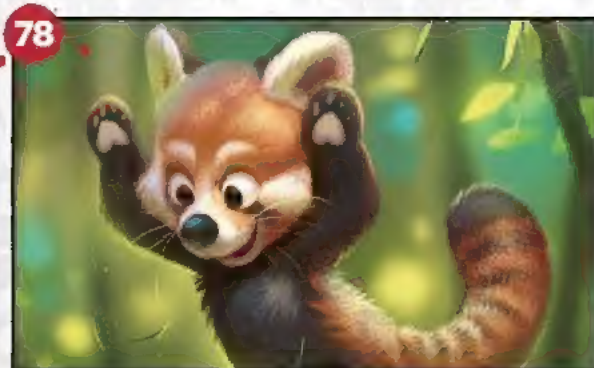
Joe Madureira finds the way

Get in-depth insights into the creation of concept art for the upcoming action role-playing game Wayfinder.



The art of Betsy Bauer

The illustrator shares her art and thoughts on working on character design for Disney, DreamWorks and more.



Designing for younger audiences

We interview the awesome Kenneth Anderson, who has created character work for the likes of CBeebies.

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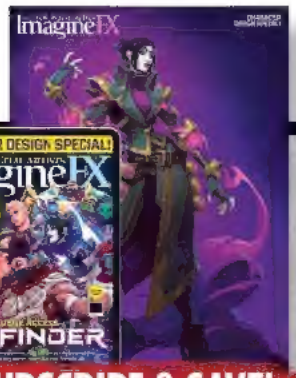


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Julio Cesar



Kudaman



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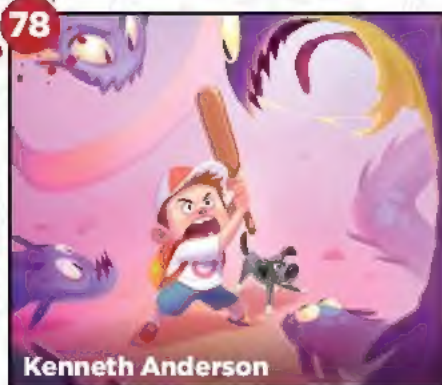
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ImagineFX



Showcase

PRO ARTISTS SHARE THEIR CHARACTER CONCEPTS



1



Julio Cesar

LOCATION: Brazil **MEDIA:** Photoshop, Procreate, Paint Tool SAI **WEB:** www.instagram.com/mz09art

Also known as MZ09, Jullo is an art director, character designer and visual artist. He has worked for major companies as a freelance character designer, such as DreamWorks TV, Nick Jr. and Disney Animation.

"Currently I'm focused on my career as a visual artist on my project Alleathorium," he says. "It initially emerged as a reflection of the personal tastes that have influenced my development, steering away from the trends imposed by the Western animation market.

"That's why in many of my artworks, the characters seem to be dissociating. It's my way to understand what I want to convey, what I want to say, and where it belongs.

"The project has evolved, and now I aim to merge my culture with the influences that shaped my art, as in my artwork Celestial Mandacaru Flower. I drew a girl in cangaceiro clothes, worn by individuals in armed groups that operated in Northeast Brazil in the late 19th and mid 20th centuries, in anime style."

1 STARRY NEBULA

"I often use sparkling effects, heavily inspired by Studio Trigger. I also like to include melting eyes, influenced by Satoshi Kon's films."



8 **IMAGINEFX**

Julio Cesar



2 BLOOD RAVEN OF MAIDENS

"The first artwork from my Alleathorium project was an attempt to combine random ideas. Later, I decided to set a 'draw this in your style' challenge, and the artwork went viral on Instagram."


3 BUBBLEGUM PSYCHIC

"I enjoy adding sparkles and elements melting with chromatic aberrations, as well as futuristic and alien-like clothing. This creates a sense of strangeness that is counterbalanced by the striking, vibrant colours."

4 MANDACARU CELESTIAL FLOWER

"A blend of anime style with elements from my culture. I mix playful and surrealistic elements, and feature a cangaceiro character."

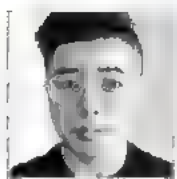




“Now I aim to merge my culture with the influences that shaped me as an artist”

5 SPARKLE OF THE UNKNOWN

“Using the same concept from Bubblegum Psychic, I explore colour combinations while not overdoing the shapes.”



Jon Lam

LOCATION: Canada

MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate, Storyboard Pro

WEB: <https://droidbrush.carbonmade.com>

Jon is a professional storyboard artist and character designer who works in the video games and animation industries. His clients include the likes of Riot Games, Blizzard, Marvel Studios and The Line.

"There is nothing that brings me more joy than telling stories with my artwork, whether it be through storyboarding, comics, writing, illustrations or character designs," says Jon. "Finding out who a character is, what it is that drives them, and how they interact with other characters has always sparked my interest, and there is always something new that can be learned."

"Observation is important, but living and having new experiences is even more vital. Grow with your experiences, and be curious, and your art will improve naturally. The art community is my family, where we learn and support each other. Our purpose in life is to learn and to give joy to those around us. We wear our hearts on our sleeves, and to be vulnerable is to be strong."



1 NIGHT SLAPPER

"A character created for fun based on a popular comic. The Night Slapper is a nurse who disciplines unruly patients with slaps."

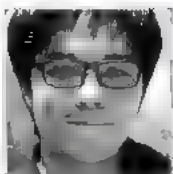
2 AMARA

"The main character from my project, Echonauts, about a special operative who exorcises monsters. She can take a lot of damage as she herself isn't human."

3 STRONGER TOGETHER

"An illustration from the height of the pandemic. It's my way of envisioning a future where all of us can build towards something great together, like a mech."





Kudaman

LOCATION: Malaysia MEDIA: Photoshop
WEB: www.artstation.com/kudaman

Tan Zhi Hui, AKA Kudaman, is a freelance digital illustrator and concept artist based in Malacca, Malaysia. He works primarily in the video game industry, specialising in visual development, character concepts, character stylisation and illustration.

Some of Kudaman's most notable clients include, Epic Games, Supercell, Wizards of the Coast, Blizzard Entertainment, Amazon Games and Tencent Games.

"Drawing inspiration from daily life, my surroundings, and animated films and series, I firmly believe that pursuing a passion, even from within the confines of a comfort zone, greatly contributes to an artist's development in the long run," Kudaman says.



1 2022
"Jumping into the Year of the Tiger with boundless energy and leaping towards new opportunities."

2 2023
"As the Year of the Rabbit neared, the tiger's ears grew, its fur was shed, and its prominent stripe vanished, symbolising a metamorphosis."



3 FIRST GENERATION
"In my latest take on
crossovers, Doraemon meets
Pokemon. Here Nobita is a
Pokemon trainer, with his
friends as first-gen starters."

“The mech design and stylisation in Evangelion is a massive inspiration”



4 BATMAN
“While everyone is captivated by Batman’s tight, ultra-aerodynamic suit and mesmerising smile, nobody has noticed his pointed, mispositioned ears”

5 EVA 01
“The mech design and stylisation in Evangelion is a massive inspiration. This artwork also remains one of my personal favourites”

6 EVA 02
“I incorporated samurai elements in my second take on Evangelion fan art.”







I wanted to depict a queen sitting on a throne of corpses in the shape of a tongue ☹



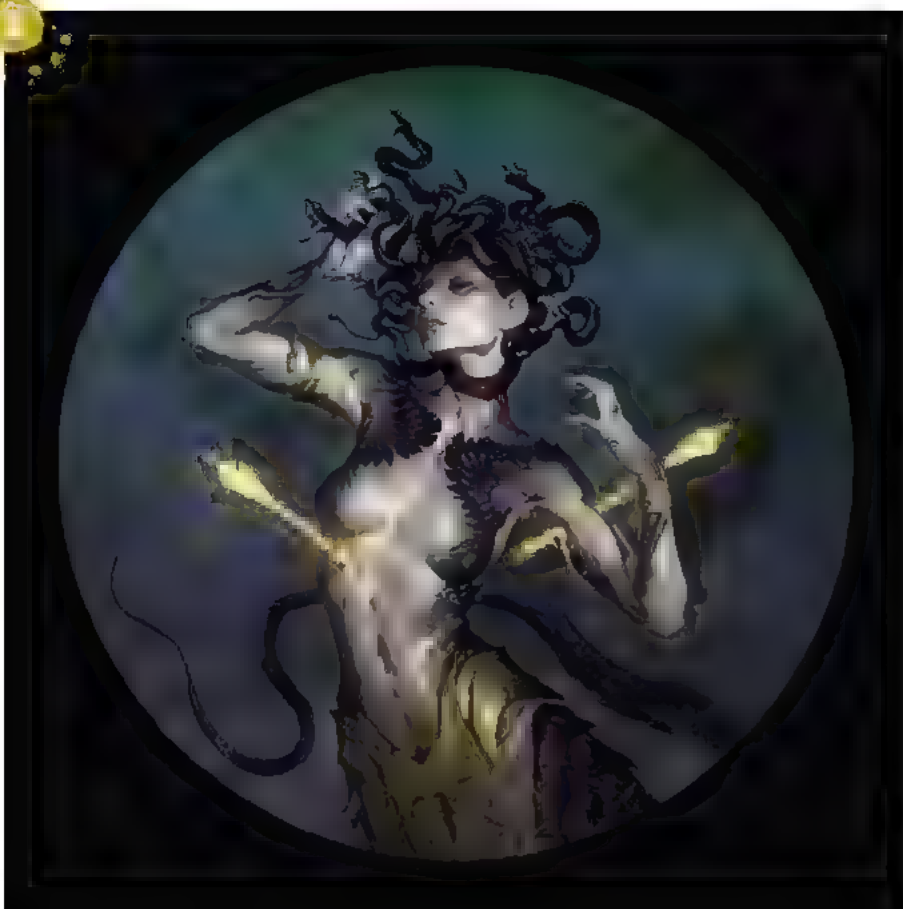
Yang J

LOCATION China MEDIA: Photoshop
WEB: www.instagram.com/djangoly

Yang J is a digital artist based in China, who has created concept work for a number of companies in the video games industry.

"I currently live and work in Shanghai," he says "I previously spent many years at Epic Games, where I provided concept designs for various projects including Fortnite. Currently I'm working for a mobile gaming company."

"I haven't been actively managing my social media platforms lately, but I plan to begin uploading more of my artwork onto my Instagram page. You can also see more of my work on ArtStation."



1 THE TIP OF THE DEVIL'S TONGUE

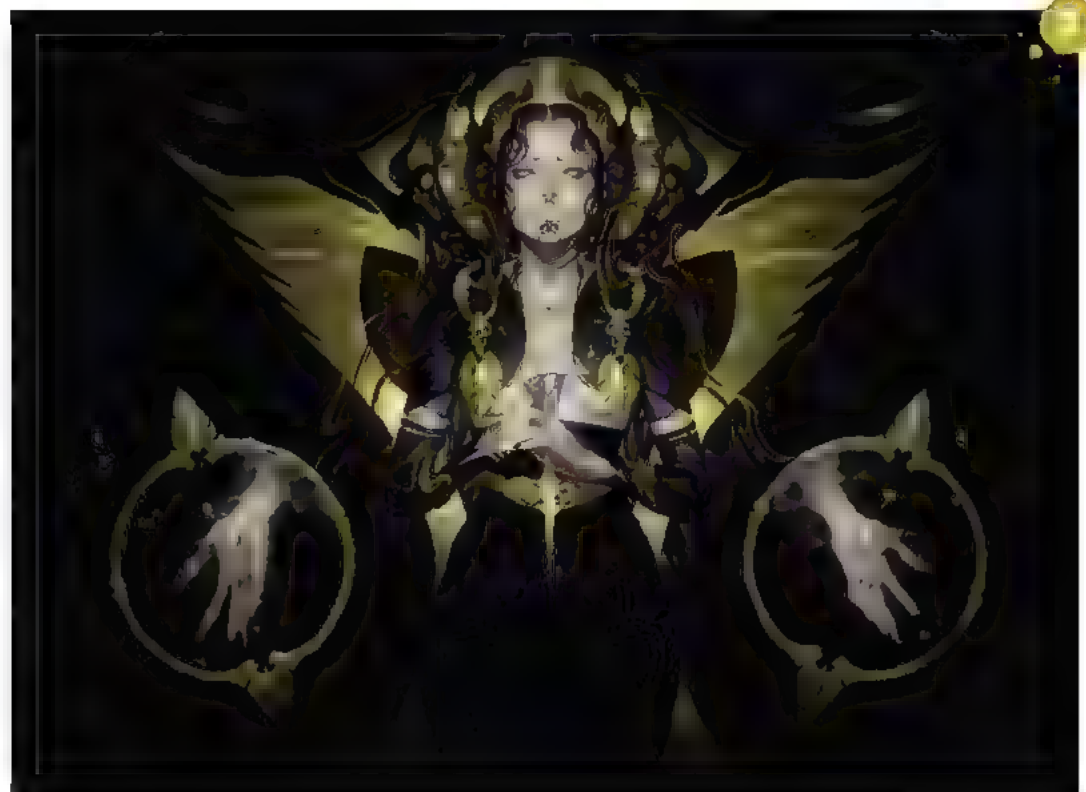
"I wanted to depict a 'queen' sat on a throne of corpses in the shape of a tongue. The woman may not be a queen, but perhaps a sacrifice. I tried to emulate Alphonse Mucha's art and added a figure in the background to enhance the mysticism."

2 CRUEL MYTH

"I'm not satisfied with this piece. With more work, I can make a breakthrough in the style and colour."

3 THE QUEEN

"I noticed similar motifs used in various cultures and envisioned each mask having different expressions and layers. I was seeking a flat, decorative style, with the goal of transitioning from realism to a new phase."





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Aron Elekes

LOCATION: Portugal

MEDIA: Photoshop, Illustrator, ZBrush

WEB: www.artstation.com/aronelekes

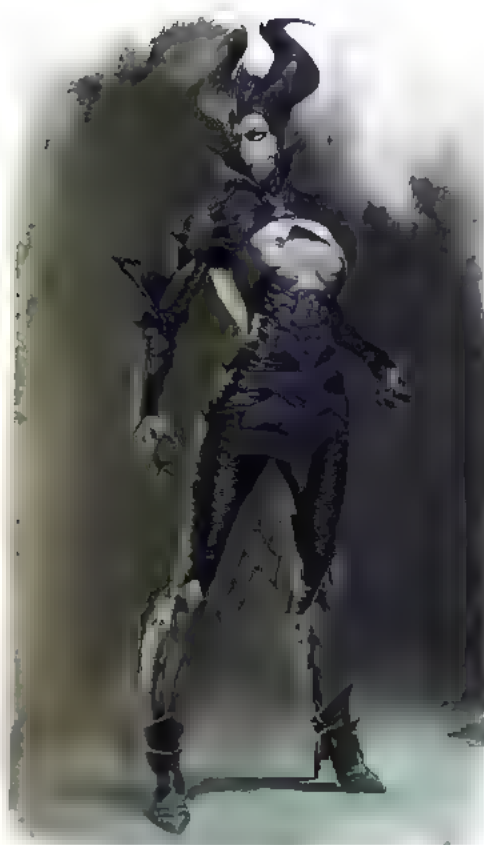
Aron is a veteran illustrator and concept artist. He has previously worked on major game projects including Injustice 2, Mortal Kombat XL and Assassin's Creed, and now also serves as a mentor.

"My background is rooted in fine art," he explains. "I went hard on figure drawing and anatomy at university; attending autopsies was a weekly activity. My enthusiasm earned me the university's most prestigious award."

"My game development career got started with Mortal Kombat XL, which was a really cool project, and I also worked on the Magic Spellslingers project with Wizards of the Coast. I then moved to LA and became a part of Riot Games for over five years. Currently I'm mentoring and working on my personal project, which involves vampires in space, as well as surfing the waves when time allows."



© Warner Bros. Games



1 LEGENDS OF RUNETERRA ART

"I started as an illustrator at Riot Games and was, in fact, the only internal illustrator on the team"

2 SCARECROW

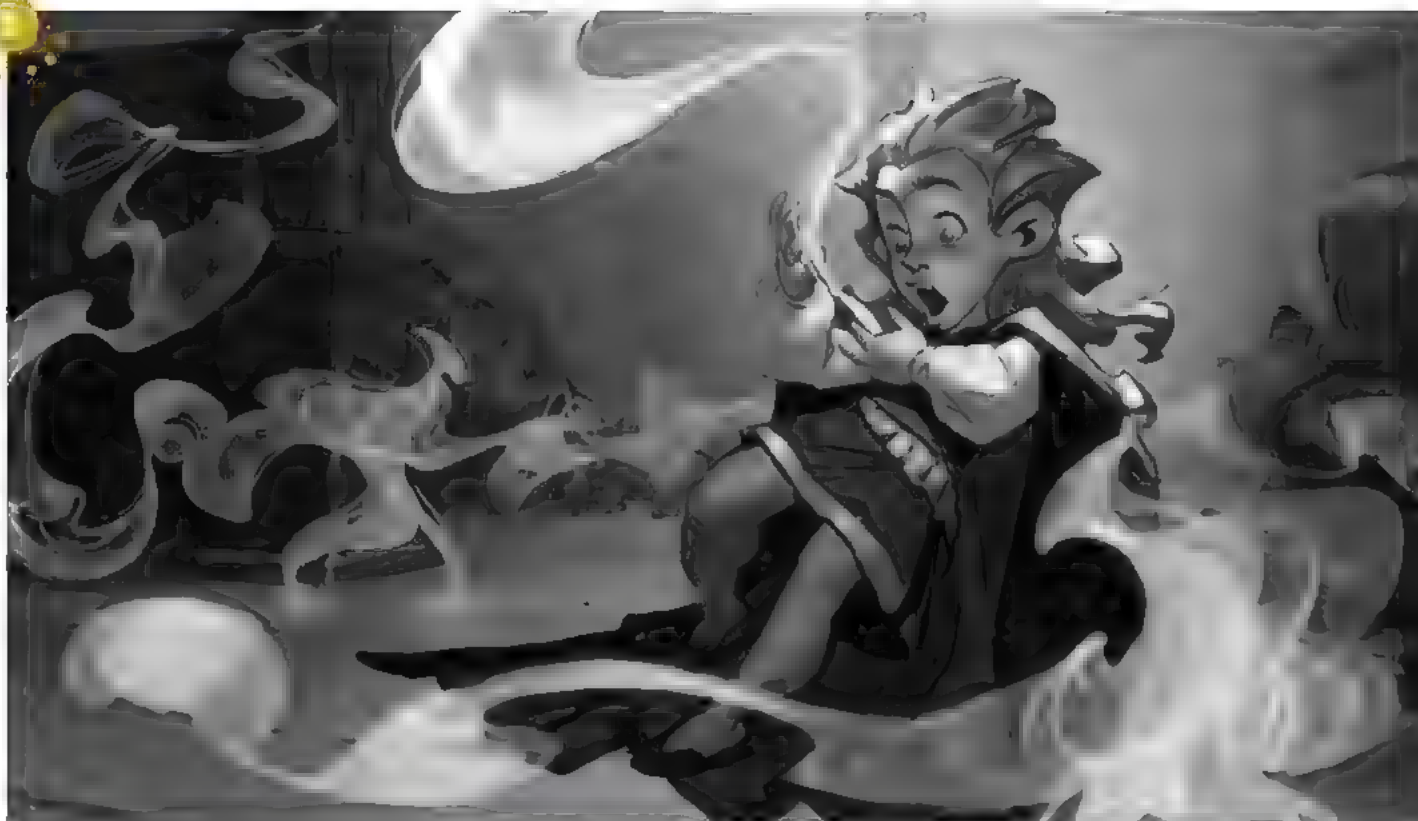
"At the start of my career I brought a lot of fine art influence into the execution of my artwork."

3 CGVERSE COVER

"The cover of my mentorship at CGVerse. These are characters that I designed, and would later redesign for Riot Games"

4 MORTAL KOMBAT XL

"My first gaming project. I'm so lucky to have had a starter like this."



Raf Gajda

“I’m constantly working on improving my skills and always open for feedback”

Wizards of the Coast



5 RELEASE

"Another aspect of art I'm excited about is to learn different styles"

6 SPACE VAMPIRES

"A personal project that I'm jamming on lately. I'm interested to see how far it can be taken."

7 XOLAAMI

"I love it when there's deep storytelling found in a character concept, like this Legends of Runeterra art."

8 SCROLLKEEPER

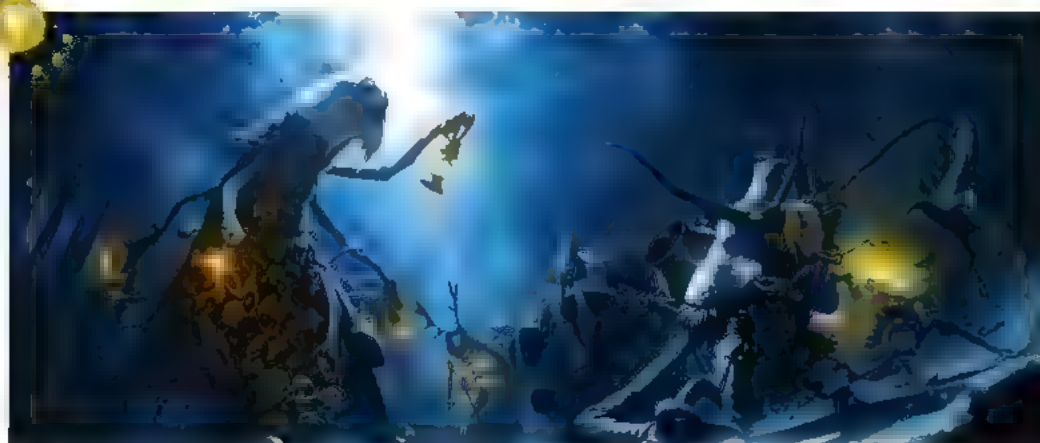
"I believe I can thrive the most when the worldbuilding and visual development elements are needed."

9 BUSHO WALK

"A personal piece that brings alive an old Hungarian pagan tradition, where the people would bury winter to welcome the spring."

10 KAYN

"A redesign of Kayn for Legends of Runeterra. It turns out that I'm better at concept art than illustration."



© Riot Games



Helena Butenkova

LOCATION Montenegro MEDIA: Photoshop
WEB: <https://acildea.artstation.com>

Helena is a character artist who is inspired by real life. She loves hearing stories about people's lives; how they feel happy or lonely, or when they are misunderstood.

"Once my friend said to me, 'Let's go draw funny postcards on the computer', and that's how I became a digital artist," says Helena. "I've drawn since I was a child, but I never thought that it could become a profession for me."

"But one day at work, I had to make a 3D visualisation for one of our projects, and I couldn't create beautiful grass. I decided that I needed to draw it using a tablet and I asked myself, 'Why can't I draw all the time?'"

HEADLESS

1 HEADLESS

"This story is about five detectives, who all have their weaknesses, but together they are strong. I love the detective who comforts the ghost. Only he can see the other world."



2 STUDY SKETCHES
"I drew this when I felt lonely. They are two sad monsters, and I hope they'll find each other!"

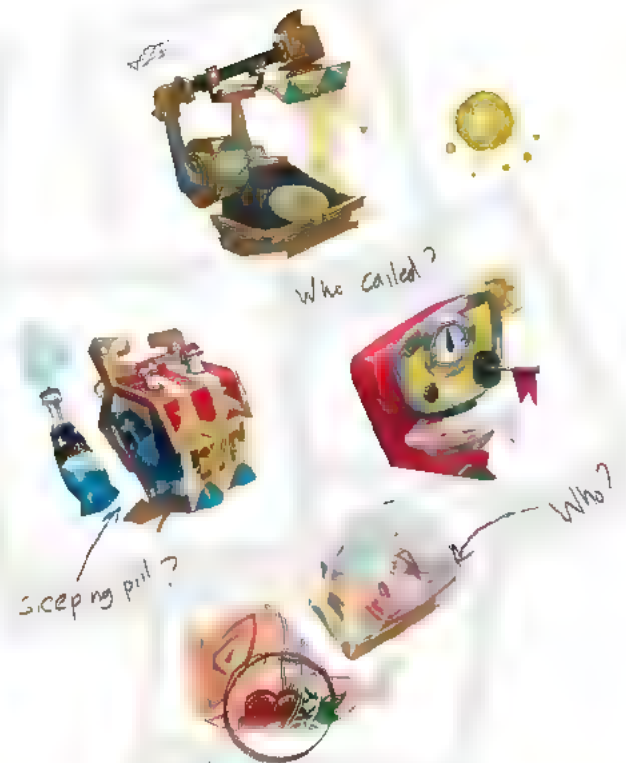


“I’ve been drawing since I was a child, but never thought it could become a profession”





Crime Freedom



3 FOX FAMILY

"My pet project about a typical family. Dad works all day, while mum does housework. The kids will have the usual family problems, while their pet is a turkey they decided not to eat!"

4 NORB'S STORE

"Norb isn't a regular toad. Since age three he's travelled around the swamps gathering everything he finds. He's proud of his golden cane. At least the merchant told him it was gold."

5 CRIME: FREEDOM

"A story about two lions from the circus, who got tired and decided to escape."

6 HEADLESS

"A shot from a mystery story, which was inspired by my dog. He's a cute dog, but what if he wasn't? I wonder whether under the cute appearance, there might be a dangerous alien hiding."

“I realised that it’s not about talent, but about conscious practice”



1 SPACE BANDITS

“As part of another training period, I decided to create a series of work called Space Bandits. It included three girls and three robots. This is a pair of those characters.”

2 SWORDSMAN

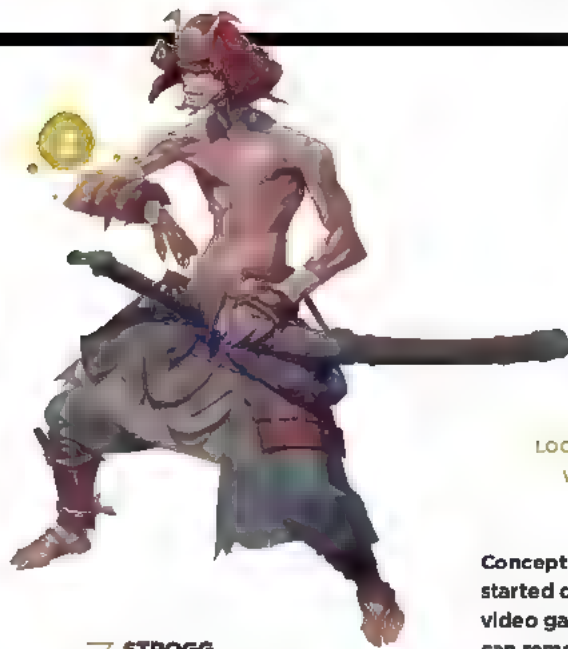
“This piece of work was inspired following another playthrough of Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice. I wanted to make a wiry yet fierce enemy in a Japanese setting.”



Evgeniy Evstratiy

LOCATION Belgium MEDIA Photoshop

WEB: www.artstation.com/lovkiy



3 STROGG

"The starting point here was a thought: what would a strogg machine gunner look like if a new Quake game came out, just like Doom in 2016?"



Concept artist and illustrator Evgeniy first started drawing as a child. He has loved video games and movies for as long as he can remember, and has a particular passion for anything science fiction.

"As a teenager I went to art school, but I was there for only three years because I got expelled for poor performance," he explains. "I got into the industry at around age 25 as a 3D artist, as I wasn't sure I had enough talent for 2D, especially concept art."

"After reading a thread online where one guy, from scratch, became an incredibly strong artist in just two years, I realised that it's not about talent, but conscious practice. At the end of 2016, at age 32, I actively began practising. Come the end of 2017, I started studying my first course in concept art, and began my career as a concept artist."



4

Showcase

☼ As is often the case, I'm guided by an image that comes to mind ☼



5 ELEPHANT ARMOR (TANK)

"As is often the case with me, I'm guided by an image that comes to my mind. Here it was the image of a huge knight in gold, elephant-styled armour with bones."







Andrés Moncayo

LOCATION US MEDIA Procreate, Photoshop

WEB <https://andresmoncayo.com>

An art director and illustrator, Andrés has worked with the likes of Disney+, ESPN and Paramount Pictures. He also leads a design and illustration course on Domestika.

"My work expresses a relationship and the connection between nature, the environment and humanity," Andrés says. "I like to give an open message to the viewer so everyone can have a personal interpretation of what they see. I typically use neon and vibrant colours to make the painting fun and attractive."

"I see myself more as a graphic designer than an artist, and I think that is reflected in my paintings. I love to use typography on them and play with the position of different elements on my pieces."

“I typically use neon and vibrant colours to make the painting fun and attractive”

1 GAARA

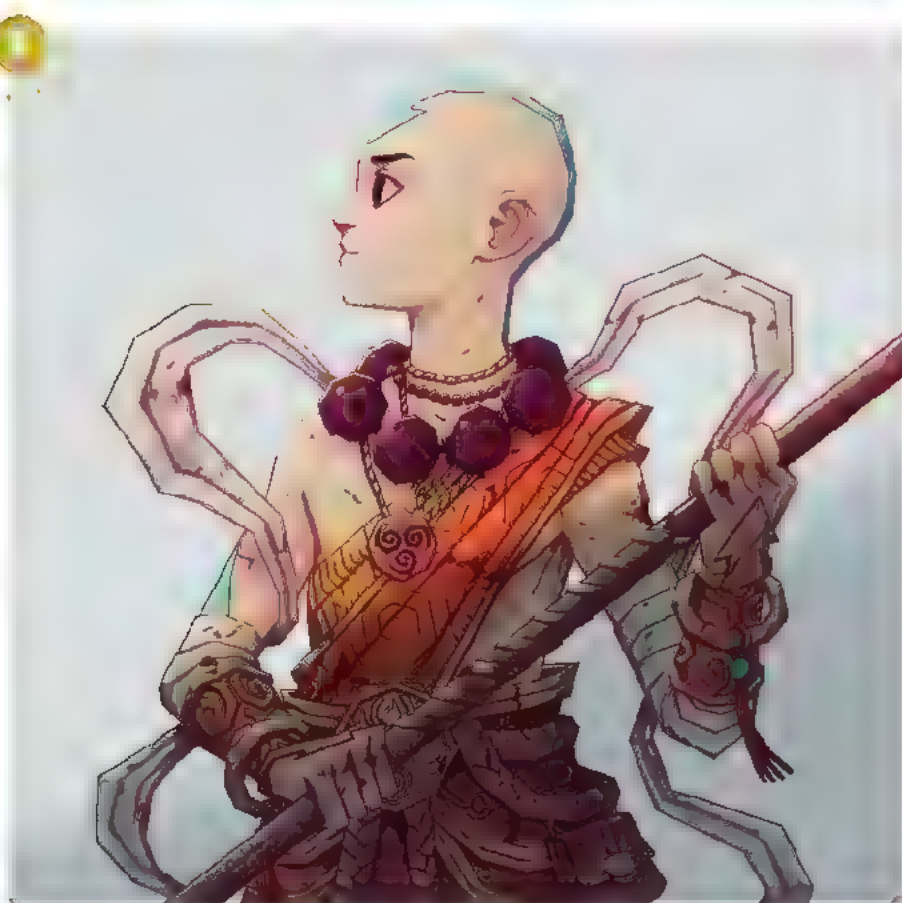
"I'm a big fan of anime in general, and in my opinion Gaara is a great character, so I wanted to make him in my style."

2 GOLD ROGER

"Fan art of Gold Roger, the legendary pirate from the manga series One Piece."

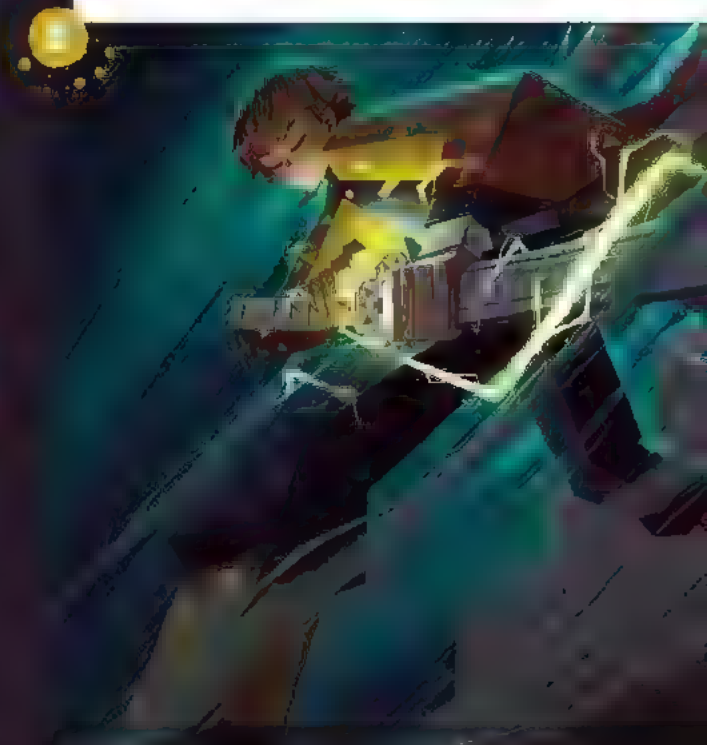
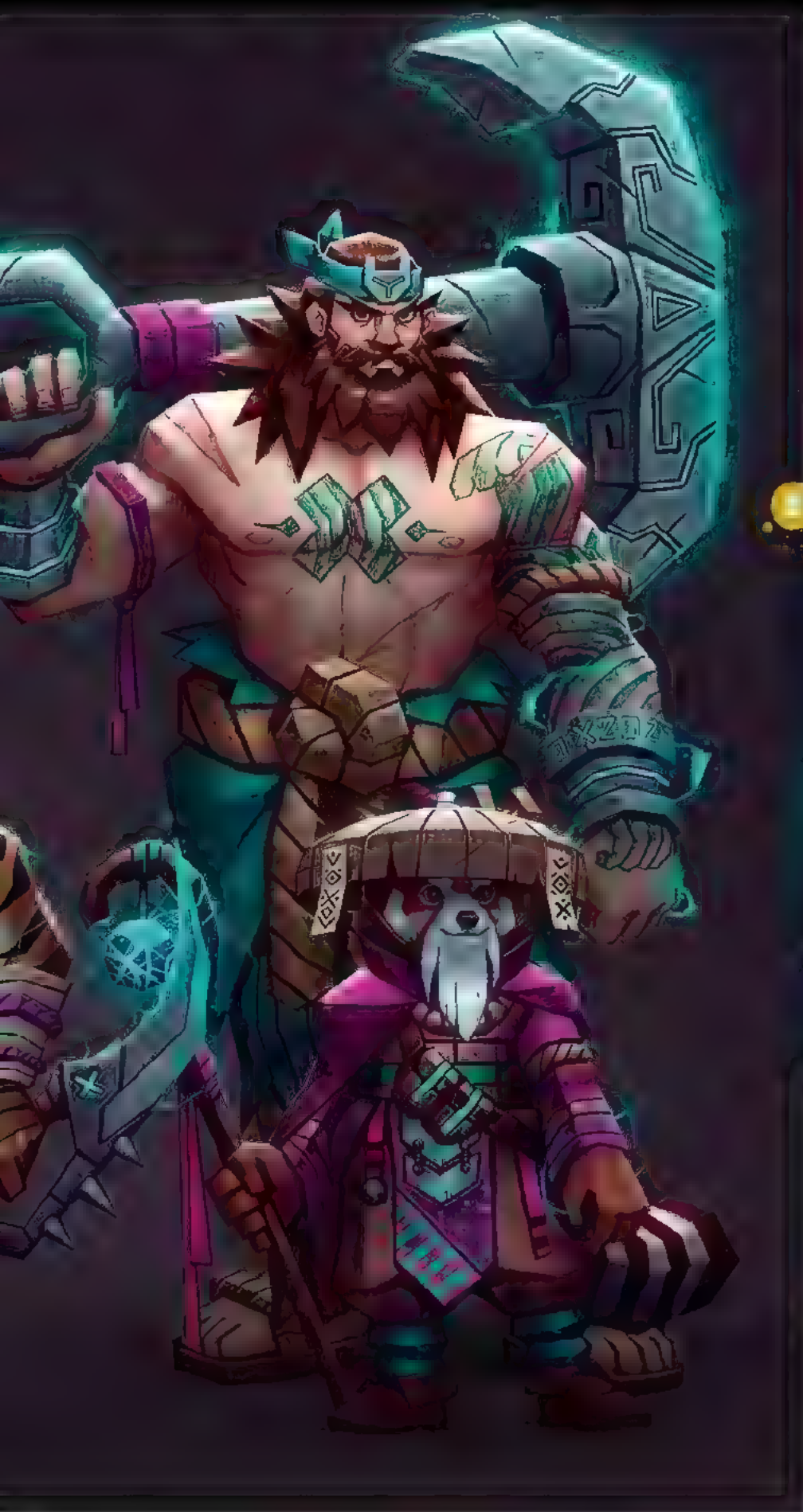
3 AANG

"This is my take on Aang from Avatar: The Last Airbender. I made his clothes more complex while keeping the original essence."





“ I see myself more as a graphic designer than an artist, and I think that is reflected in my paintings ”

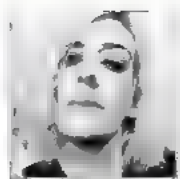


4 **STORM**

"I made this group of characters for a video game company, and I like how diverse they are, even sharing the same colours "

5 **ZENITSU**

"I wanted to create a cool angle for this one, and I'm happy with the result. I also like that I made it extra blocky "



Chloe Veillard

LOCATION France MEDIA: Photoshop

WEB www.artstation.com/badmlaou

After studying cinema in Paris, Chloe spent 15 years working in the animation and video game industries, specialising in cinematic editing and storyboarding. The studios she has worked with include the likes of Naughty Dog, Riot Games, Don't Nod, Ubisoft and Activision.

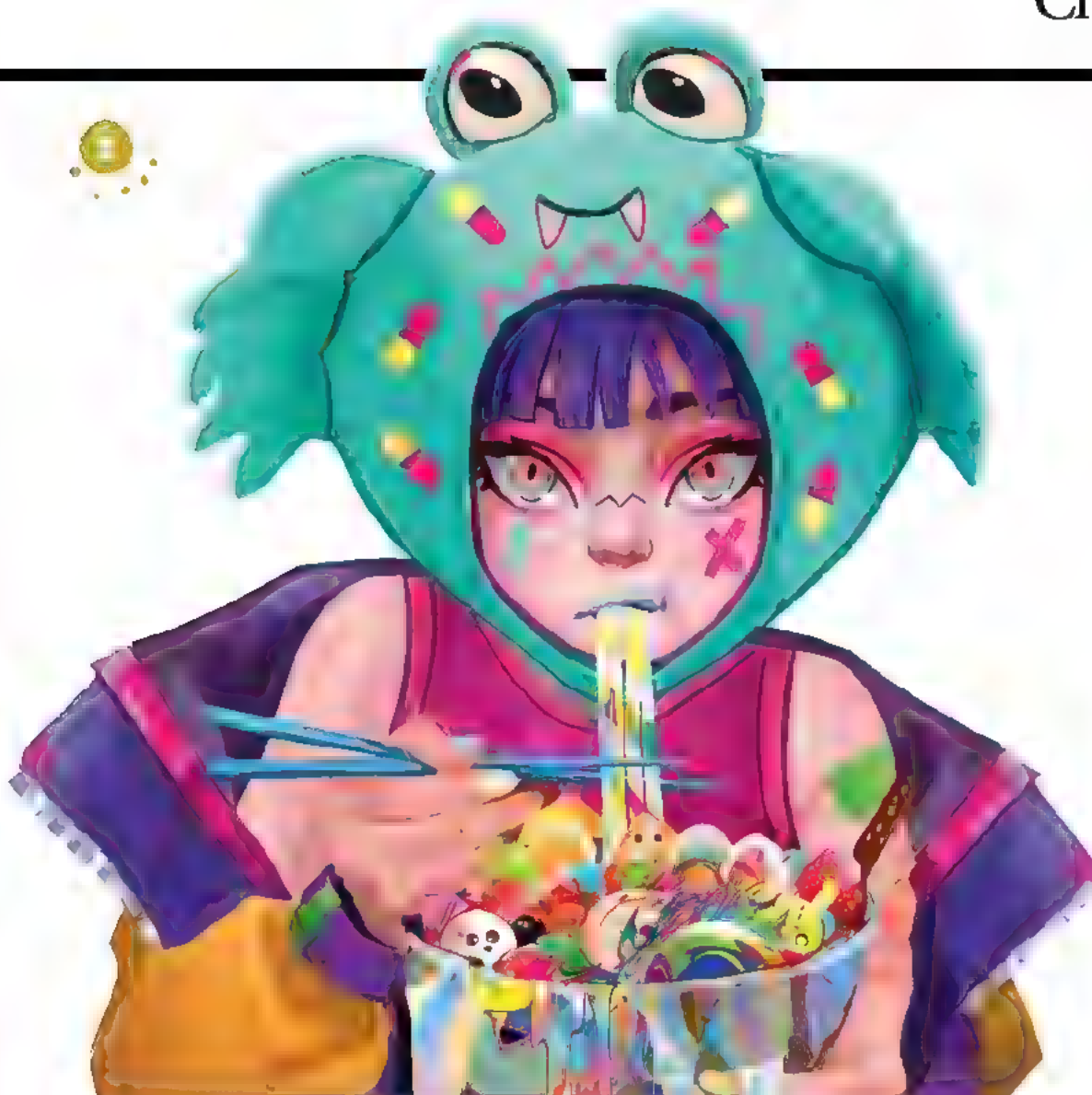
A love for concept art led her to venture into drawing eight years ago, where she started from scratch and learned everything on her own. Her forte is drawing stylised characters, but she also enjoys creating ultra-realistic characters.

“Beyoncé was my main inspiration for this character, and I loved drawing all that gold”

1 GLORY

“For Harmony: The Fall of Reverie, Don't Nod's visual novel, I had to draw the Aspirations, who are a kind of modern god, and this is Glory. Beyoncé was my main inspiration for this character, and I loved drawing all that gold. I wanted us to feel her confidence and strength when we looked at her.”



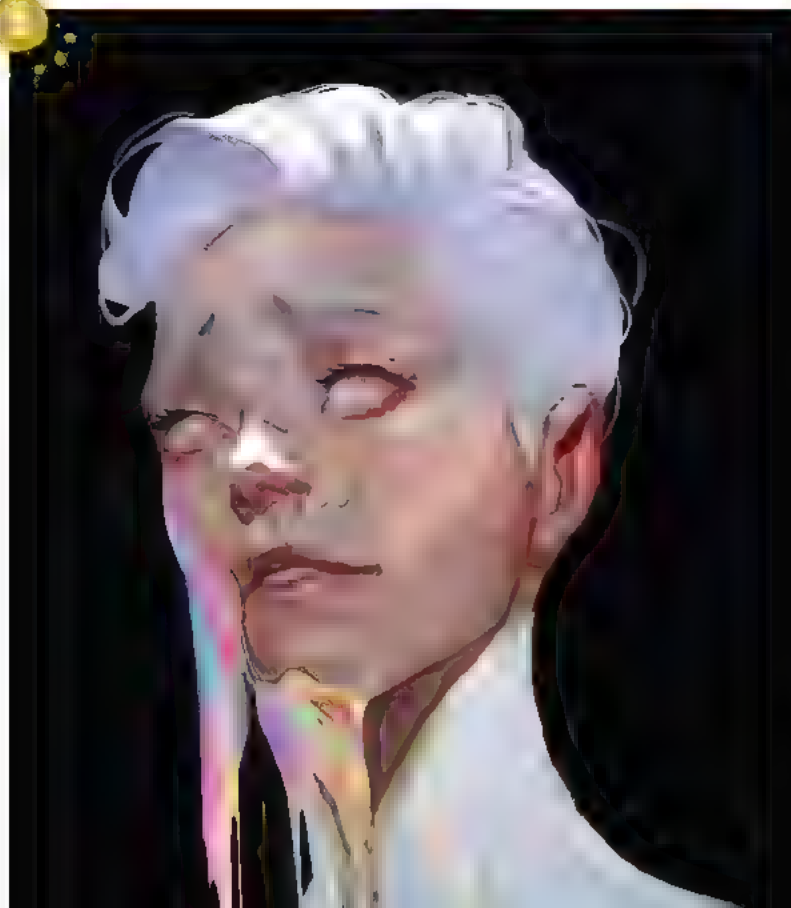


2 FELICITY

"Here is Felicity, another character for Harmony: The Fall of Reverie. I imagine her as a carefree teenager who finds solace in her digital world. She spends her time in her room surrounded by toys, video games, and giant cushions, eating noodles. In our frightening world, this is where she finds happiness and peace. The Japanese style fits the character."

3 TRUTH

"Here is Truth, one of the Aspirations from Harmony: The Fall of Reverie. In a world that's dominated by AI, fake news and deepfakes, Truth has been stripped of her credibility. I see Truth as a shattered entity, deprived of vision, with her essence flowing from her body."



4 PATCHES GIRL

"I was inspired by a character from Lena Sayaphoum for this teen girl. She loves tattoos, patches and colours, and wears her grandmother's aviator hat."



Stella Chen Yui

LOCATION: US MEDIA: Photoshop
WEB: www.artstation.com/stellachenyui

Stella is a self-taught artist working in the game and animation industries. Although originally from Taiwan, she now resides in Los Angeles and currently works at Riot Games as an illustrator.

"Having had the chance to live in France, my artistic journey has also been profoundly influenced by the tranquility of European forests, charming cottages, and the delightful variety of the local cuisine," Stella says

"I've always been fascinated by miniature houses too, where little animals cook and bake just like humans, but using tiny pots and stoves. It's my passion to create characters and worlds that are rich in emotion and evoke a sense of calm and serenity "



“ It’s my passion to create characters and worlds rich in emotion and that evoke a sense of calm and serenity ”

1 THE PRECIOUS

"This concept was chosen as one of the winners for Baroque Aristocracy Character Design Challenge "

2 THE LAST FAIRY

"Another Character Design Challenge entry, this time for the Fairies Kingdom theme. This is the last fairy of their kind, found peacefully resting in a box."

3 THE DAY I MET YOU

"It always amazes me how lucky we are to find our significant others, our best friends, and our soulmates in this huge world. I always try to keep the memory of the first time meeting the people I love in my mind. These are precious moments to me."





Showcase

4 THE SECRET BAKERY SHOP AND THE BEE DELIVERY

Concept art for my personal project. The pet ant sometimes gets in the way, but always tries to be a diligent helper. The ambience of afternoon sunlight has always been one of my favourite themes to paint.



“The ambience of
afternoon sunlight has
always been one of my
favourite themes”



Francesca Gaia Serafini

LOCATION Italy MEDIA Photoshop

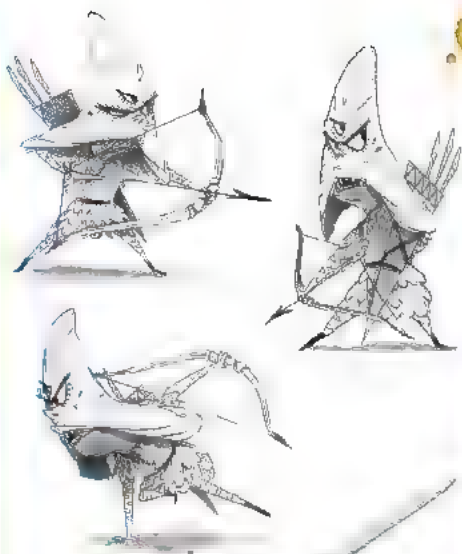
WEB: https://francesca_gaia_serafini.artstation.com

Francesca has worked in the video games world for a number of years, and is currently with Reply Game Studios. She also has a dream of working in the animation industry.

"I'm a person that's enthusiastic about life," Francesca says. "I love to learn new things, drawing and studying nature are two of my greatest passions. I always try to combine them, creating stories and characters that are inspired by the world around us, or inventing educational products for kids."

"My greatest dream is to work in animation, and to be able to give back all the emotions I felt since the first time I watched an animated movie as a child. I love stories, as they can give you the opportunity to live a thousand different lives, and sometimes they can also help you with the only life you've got when times become hard."





1 GIRL UNDER OLIVE TREE

"Sometimes I like to start working directly with colours over a quick sketch, using bright colours to suggest an atmosphere and define a specific moment"

2 MOVIE MOMENT: THE MORNING FIGHT

"An exploration of a movie moment, trying to convey an idea and a mood. Characters start to interact, or clash, with each other. In this image I wanted to show the force and the fierceness"

3 POSE SHEET

"An original character that I created by mixing a simple triangular shape and a sort of squid. I love taking inspiration from nature! I provided some poses as well as a colour render"



4 THE CRUSADER

"This crusader features very graphical lines. The sharp, clear silhouette mixes the planes, giving an almost flat feeling, while the mantle frames both the movement and the intention."

5 EXPRESSION SHEET: GLADIUS THE FAIRY FIGHTER

"I love to study expressions because the characters start to feel alive, and you can tell a whole story through them. This character was created during a course with the amazing Nate Wragg at CG Master Academy"





Qiu Fang

LOCATION US MEDIA Photoshop
WEB www.artstation.com/qfang

Qiu Fang is a US-based artist and instructor, who currently works as a principal concept artist with Riot Games.

"Manga had a profound influence over my art as a kid," he says "I'd pore over Dragon Ball, Naruto and Bleach, and draw pages of my own panels. In high school, my passion for games merged with my love for drawing and inspired me to become a concept artist."

"As a concept artist, I see myself first as a problem solver. I approach each character design first by crafting a unique puzzle, and then unravelling them. Ultimately, I want my characters to be memorable because of their ideas, evoking a sense of a broader world and narrative beyond just drawings."

“In high school, my passion for video games merged with my love for drawing”

1 OMAKASE! DRAGONSLAYER

"A whimsical world where fantastical beasts are used in high-end cuisine. Dragon sashimi requires precise and delicate handling. Best served fresh and chilled."

2 ENVOY OF EDEN

"This is a design exercise that explores a combination of a space girl, a partial pressure suit, rococo motifs, and rose petals."

3 THE GUARDIAN

"The guardian of the ruins of a long lost civilisation. He channels archaic spiritual energy through his staff and totem to fend off curious explorers and looters."

4 THE WARPRIEST

"Having had her child ripped away and imbued into the priest at birth, the mother salamander now unwillingly sustains and protects the captor, as he and her youngling's lives are intertwined."





Marcus Williams

LOCATION US MEDIA Paint Tool SAI, Procreate
WEB <https://marcusthevisual.com>

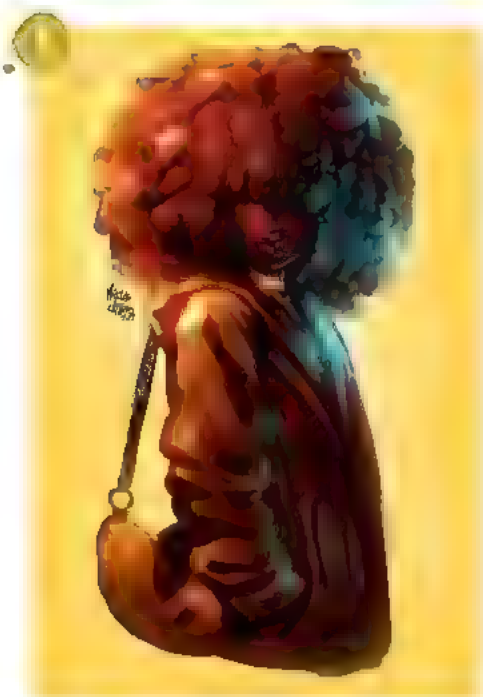
A long-time lover of video games, comic art and all things animated, Marcus began dedicating his young artistic years to fine-tuning his illustration by way of freelancing.

"Over 18 years later, I'm catching my stride and still growing in the hope of being a well-rounded illustrator," he says "I spend most of my time toiling late nights on everything from illustrating comic art, fan art and children's books to random character commissions

"A proud father of two, I somehow manage to steal away enough time to create loads of art and check homework. I'm excited for the direction my comic properties are heading, and look forward to creating more forms of visual entertainment and stories to enjoy"

1 AFRO ON YELLOW

"Afros of all shapes and styles look amazing in all shades and hues. Showing diverse African diaspora hair using different illustration approaches is another personal artistic challenge I dedicate myself to."



2 COORDINATES

"An intergalactic traveller setting the coordinates for his next destination across the cosmos. High technology concepts are something that I often incorporate in my science fiction designs."

3 CYBERPUNK PALLET

"That side-eye glance from across the room might lead to more of a colourful evening than you anticipated. Dynamic colour palettes and vibrancy is an area that I admittedly struggled with over the years, but has slowly become a favourite artistic workout during the last decade."

"I somehow manage to steal away enough time to create loads of artwork and check any homework"





4 MERMAID OCTODIVE

When an inquisitive but inventive young octo-mermaid wants to see the surface world with her own eyes, a discarded diving helmet filled with water offers the perfect solution. Instilling personality within my character art is an ongoing goal as a character designer.

☞ Instilling personality within my character art is an ongoing goal ☞

5 **ORANGEBLUE**

"The puzzling look from an orange elf after hearing a hard truth. Combining an understanding of ethnicity, colour theory, character design and culture into my art yields a potent mix of visual soul food that I strive to improve throughout my creative journey."





Wei Ming Dong

LOCATION China MEDIA Photoshop
WEB www.artstation.com/warmdong

Wei Ming Dong, also known as Ming, is a concept artist based in China. A graduate of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute based in Chongqing, they have since garnered 10 years of experience working in the industry.

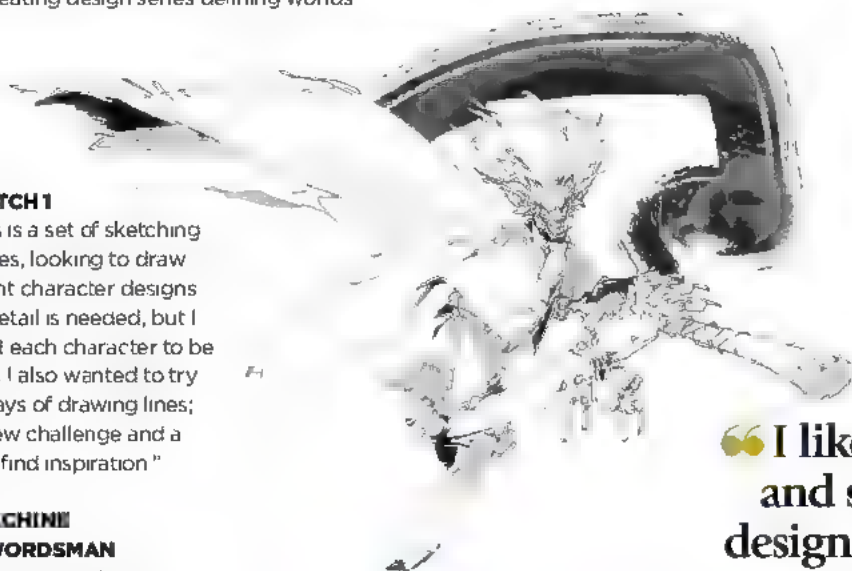
"I like to draw magical and science fiction-themed designs, and I'm also interested in fashion and cyber themes," Ming says. "I like to draw simple sketches and spend more time creating design series defining worlds."

1 SKETCH 1

"This is a set of sketching exercises, looking to draw different character designs. Little detail is needed, but I wanted each character to be unique. I also wanted to try new ways of drawing lines; it's a new challenge and a way to find inspiration."

2 MACHINE SWORDSMAN

"I wanted to combine an Eastern martial arts theme with machines, as well as the ancient times with the future. I designed three characters: a ninja, a sumo, and a monk."



"I like to draw simple sketches and spend more time creating design series defining worlds"



3 PUPPET

"A character from the Eastern dark world; it is a puppet made by people. Each puppeteer controls a monster as their minion, which is also their means of attack. Asian elements are combined in the design."



4 GROWLING TIGER, ROARING DRAGON

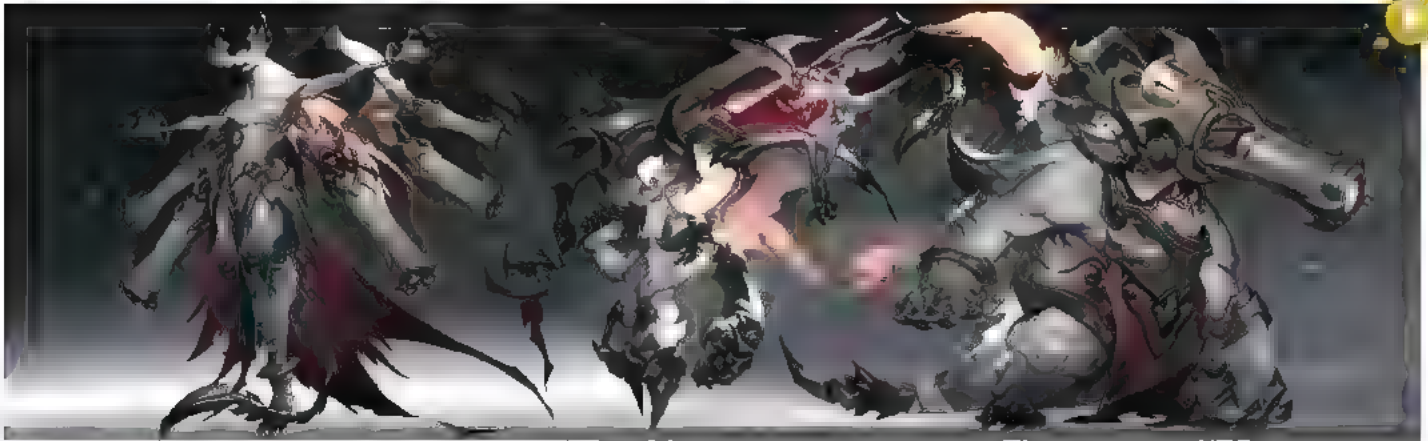
"A Chinese-style painting using ink and wash, inspired by the Chinese idiom 'growling tiger, roaring dragon'. I added story, with a man fighting a giant dragon. A female warrior is also fighting a tiger, preparing to cut off its head, when the tiger lets out a roar."



5 SKETCH 2

"Another set of sketching exercises, drawing quick characters with little detail. This time I sketched out 10 different characters. They are a birdman, a demon general, a mechanical female demon, a mechanical girl, a mobster, a samurai, an old man, a shaman, a warlock, and a warrior."





“They are ruthless war machines out to conquer the human continent”



6 WAR MACHINE

“The concept of this collection is an evil army composed of demons. They are cold-blooded, ruthless war machines out to conquer the human continent, and have powerful technology and magic at their disposal. This set is designed with four types of soldiers: the gunner, a mobile battery, a heavy gunner and a signal soldier”

7 MECHANICAL DEATH COURT

“I wanted to design a set of robot courts to judge human beings, and add elements of death and religion to create a sense of mystery, which looks like it comes from a different world. I created five unique roles with distinct identities, including an apostle, a judge, a decider, an executioner, and a moving cage.”

8 MECHANICAL INSECTS

“A biomechanical unit. Every robot contains design elements taken from insects, integrating moths, beetles, flies and mosquitoes. They are in humanoid form and combine insects, machinery, and three human elements.”





Stephanie Rizo

LOCATION US MEDIA Procreate

WEB: www.stephanierizo.com

Stephanie is a Mexican-American character designer and story artist in animation. She grew up in Costa Mesa, California, where she attended Orange Coast College and studied narrative illustration.

After graduating she worked at Starbucks during the day and as a freelance character designer at night. Her first job in the industry was working for a short time on the Unikitty! show at Warner Bros. Animation. Since then, Stephanie has been a freelance character designer for studios such as Nickelodeon, DreamWorks TV, Disney TV, Stoopid Buddy Stoodios and Netflix, where she was part of the team that created Arlo the Alligator Boy. She is currently a story artist for Walt Disney Animation Studios.

“I keep it loose and don’t worry about a perfect design”

1 WOLF PUNK

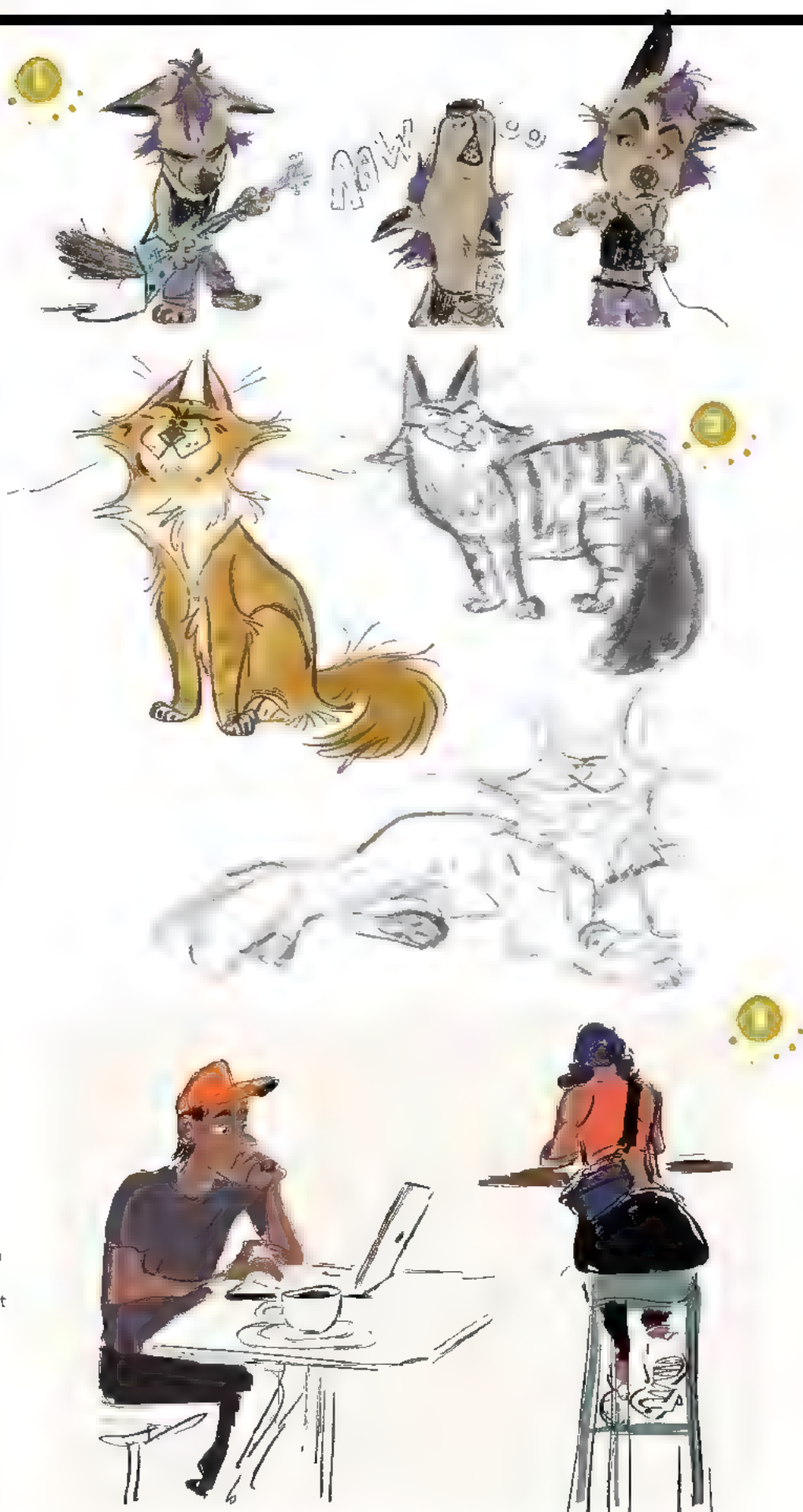
“This design was inspired by the riot grrrl scene, and I wanted to use that energy and freedom. When exploring I keep it loose and don’t worry too much about a perfect design. Here I created three poses telling us who this character might be.”

2 SIMBA

“These explorations were inspired by my cat, Simba. I exaggerated the shapes to push the heaviness and thickness, and used a charcoal/pencil brush in Procreate to get that rough and sketchy style.”

3 COFFEE SHOP GESTURES

“Gesture drawings I like to do at coffee shops. It’s important to keep practising storytelling and shape design, and studying from life is one of the best ways to do it. I make sure not to focus so much with line work and think more about the gesture.”



WOLF IN LEATHER

"I wanted to push the style of this cool wolf I looked at references for inspiration and saw some wolves' coats can be wiry, which I implemented for a grunge look"



5 ART CRITIC

"The lineup of this design was inspired by watching art critics be so judgemental towards the simplest of art pieces. To convey that, I sketched out this cat with big pink glasses and a turtleneck to give them a much more sophisticated look. When I'm exploring the character, it always helps me to sketch out gesture poses of how they might act."

Feature

FINDING THE CREATIVE WAY

James Dyer talks to Airship Syndicate creative director Joe Madureira and his team about their concept work for upcoming RPG **Wayfinder**



Envisioning other worlds is a not insignificant challenge. It's also an opportunity, of course. For their upcoming project *Wayfinder*, Airship Syndicate has developed a new space and place for gamers to contend with intergalactic conflict.

Our conversation begins with an exploration of what constitutes the overall design philosophy at the game studio. Brian Jones, the team's character lead, sets the conversation in motion when he notes the first questions typically

FICTION FUSION

In *Wayfinder*, Airship Syndicate continues to evolve its style, fusing fantasy and science-fiction genres.

asked of a design and concept. "Is it cool? Is it engaging?" he says. "As simple as it sounds, we constantly ask ourselves these questions. If it isn't, we go a different direction or iterate until it is. We focus on making exciting and dynamic characters and creatures that not only look great, but also expand upon the rich lore of our worlds."

Director of brand Billy Garretsen embellishes Brian's observation. "We hold our art to very high standards, so there is a core philosophy of quality that brings it all together," he explains. "Both Airship Syndicate and Digital Extremes [publisher] believe in

making games that value our players' time, and we try our best to make each character as compelling to look at as they are to play. We don't spend too much time chasing visual trends from other games on the market and really enjoy carving out our own space. We often think, 'What would we want to play?' and then make it."

For all of the team's enthusiasm, there's also a recognition that making creative choices that work is not easy; that it always involves challenges. Of these challenges, in relation to the character design work undertaken for *Wayfinder*, the CEO and creative

“We hold our art to very high standards, so there is a core philosophy of quality that brings it all together.”

FOUNDERS PACK PREVIEW

Character designs emphasise the combination of a striking visual with effective gameplay.



director Joe Madureira points out one specific challenge. "We started out with a broader and more traditional character creation system," he says.

"When we pivoted to become more character focused, we did have some work to do in converting those early characters and rigs [some work had already been done on them, including animations] to be the more iconic-feeling Wayfinders like those we've introduced. Creatures are a bit easier and sometimes more fun!"

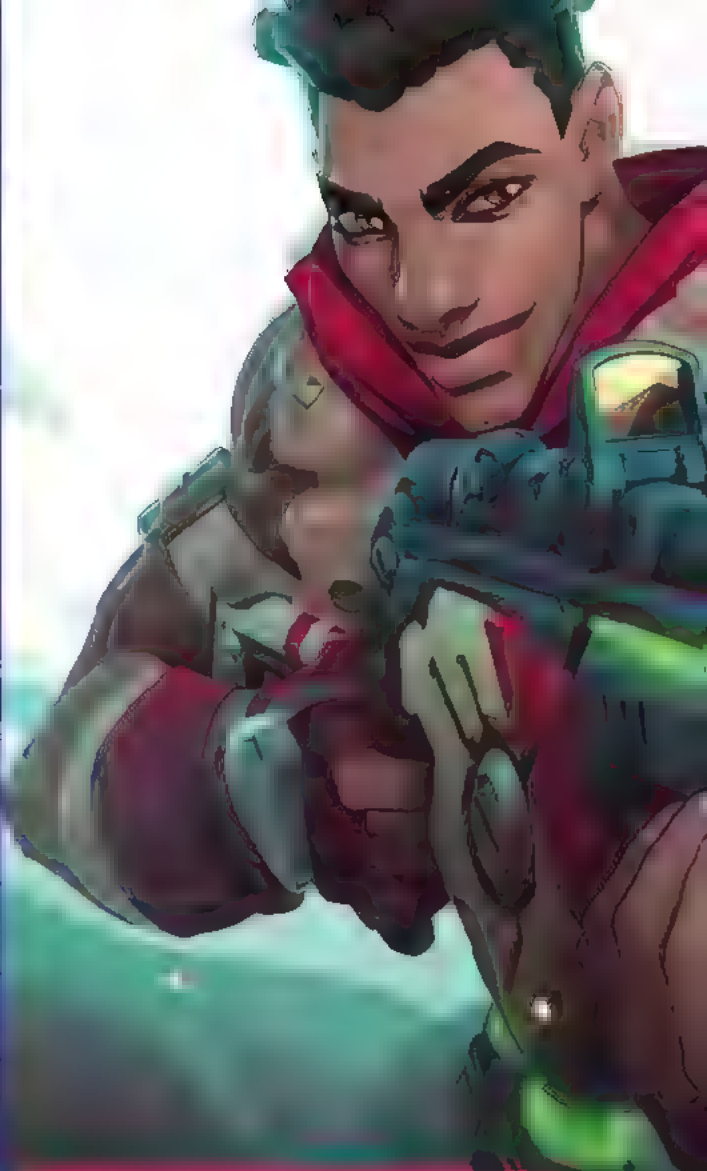
SWAPPABLE ELEMENTS

That integration of systems at the studio provide the space in which to be creative, as Brian explains: "We have different systems when it comes to different types of characters and creatures, each with their own set of rules. The Style System [swappable cosmetic components] for instance, requires that we make predetermined parts of the Wayfinders be swappable and as compatible between each

costume as possible. It's a lot of work, but it makes customising your look a lot more dynamic."

"On the flip side our Personas [full-body costumes] give us the freedom to make cool one-off costumes that aren't limited by the style system. For the creatures and enemies, we've adopted a philosophy that each behavioural and/or combat difference should have a unique visual adjustment. You should be able to know at a glance that an enemy has a unique gameplay experience. This can range from as little as a colour variant to a full new model, animation, VFX and sound."

Another dynamic for the artists to negotiate has been the balance between 'cool' character design and the necessary, more practical functions of how a character works within the game space of Wayfinder. Of this, Joe notes: "I feel like finding that balance is one of our ongoing struggles, and each one presents new challenges, especially since we really want to



FROM COMIC ART TO VIDEO GAMES

Creative director Joe Madureira on working between the two formats

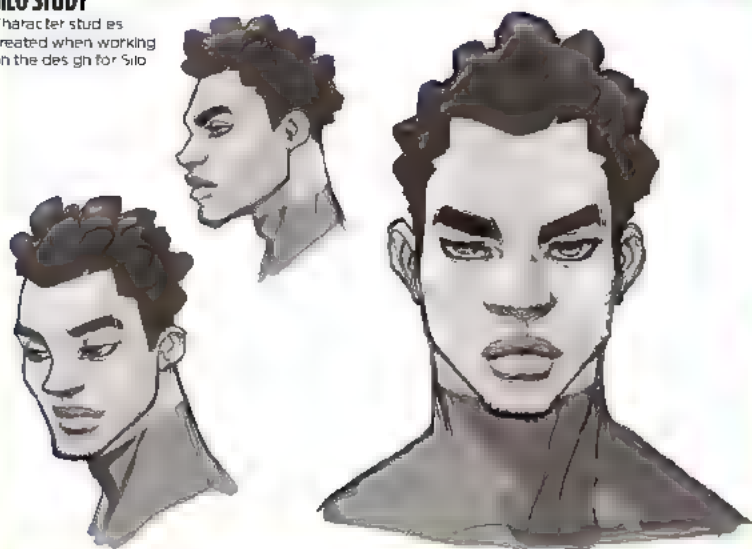
"I think the constraints and thought process are a bit different, but like comics, all my stuff pushes very big, chunky characters and stylised shapes, lots of colour and energy. We don't really create realistic-looking stuff, even though I'm a fan of playing them. And everything and everyone has muscles. Lots of them."

Keeping things fresh is the biggest struggle. Which tropes to lean into, and which to avoid, so that our world feels familiar, or immediately relatable but still new and unlike anything you've seen in our past games or elsewhere. The Gloom for example started with the concept of magic being treated as almost an alien presence. Very sci-fi; more like something you would see in *Annihilation* or *The Expanse* than magic in a traditional fantasy world.

"We wanted it to feel out of place, like it clearly did not belong in this world. I think all of our artists took a stab at it and whittled away at it over time. I don't think we liked the results until very recently, actually. Flesh and blood monsters are a bit easier and more fun, in my opinion! As the game world gets larger, we hope to add more ambient creatures to help flesh it out, not just hostile monsters."

SILO STUDY

Character studies created when working on the design for Silo



Wayfinder

RANGER DANGER

Silo's design combines the traditional ranger style with elements of tactical gear

Sometimes we pivot based on how the artists and team react; how excited they are, or aren't

COMPLEX CONCEPTS

The concept designs suggest the complexity of movement and expression involved with the game

differentiate one from the next and make each of our Wayfinders special.

"Leaning into those unique aspects of each character and how they play within the game always helps us get over the hump. You also learn what's possible or difficult over time, and it almost becomes second nature knowing what's an easy win, or what's going to be too complex scope-wise."

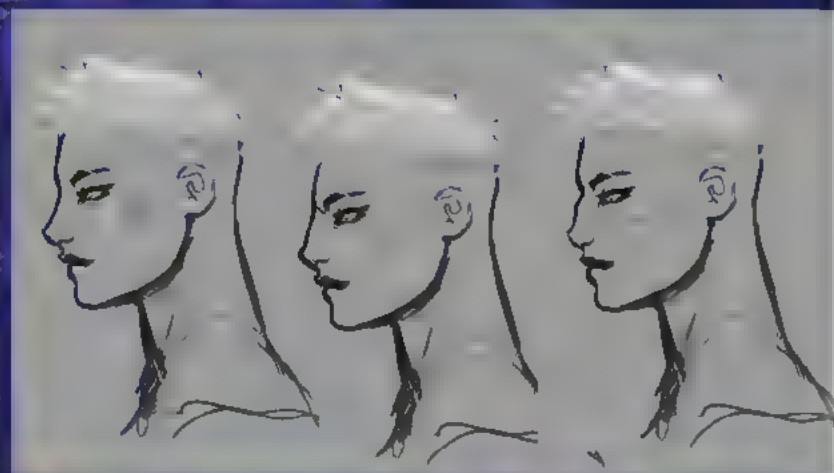
Brian adds: "For us, I don't think the two are necessarily exclusive. We're always looking to do the 'coolest' thing possible. If anything, the visuals often add to the functionality. We have an amazing design team that comes up with great ideas. It then goes into the art process where the design often gets moulded by the visual elements. The collaboration always leads to amazing-looking, functional characters."

RECOGNISED STYLE

With Airship Syndicate's house style recognised and enjoyed by its fans and players, Joe digs into how the character

designs for Wayfinder are consistent with earlier work at the studio, while also showcasing new sensibilities. "All our characters in Wayfinder definitely have the look of our established house style," he says. "One major difference is that we feature the characters more prominently, and they are much larger on screen, our past few titles having been isometric with combat mapped to a 2D backdrop. For this reason, the characters we create have to be much higher fidelity, with more complex rigs, facial animations, and so on."

As I mentioned, we like to avoid repeating ourselves, so finding new ways of creating fantasy characters that feel fresh pushes us in unexpected directions. For instance, we're adding many more sci-fi elements than we originally planned. Sometimes we pivot based on how the artists and team react; how excited they are, or aren't. And of course, keeping an eye on the community's reactions is going to influence those choices further."



Joe then makes a point about character design and identifies two that fuse classic fantasy with a harder sci-fi, technological look. "Wingrave is pretty straightforward," he adds. "He's got the vibes of a traditional paladin, but his armour is carved with glowing accents that make it look almost like Tony Stark's idea of a knight."

"Meanwhile, Silo started as a pretty straightforward rogue/ranger type, but we updated his leather armour with

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Questions of role within the game and character archetype prompt initial design explorations.

a strong dynamic visual influence in Joe Madureira. Most of us are huge fans of his style and it's just natural to incorporate it into what we do. This is the first fully PBR [physically-based rendering] project where the camera isn't locked in an isometric angle. It does present new obstacles, but it's also freeing in that we get to put a lot



MIXING GENRES

Balancing the fantasy and science fiction elements in Wayfinder's character design has been key.

H We've been mixing genres more and more, which really makes Wayfinder feel both unique and approachable.

more tactical gear as well as a sportier silhouette. We gave him a rifle instead of a bow. But in the very first sketches of him, he was hooded and had a bow, which is much more traditional for a ranger type. We attempt to apply this process wherever we can, while trying not to lose the appeal of the core fantasy world beneath.

Of the Airship aesthetic, Brian notes: "Each project has its own visual identity while at the same time feeling connected. It doesn't hurt to have such

more fidelity into each character.

Additionally, we have been mixing genres more and more, which really makes Wayfinder feel both unique and approachable. Are you a fan of fantasy? We have something for you! Sci-fi? We have you covered too. It's made for an extremely fun project to work on as an artist.

In developing the character concept designs for Wayfinder, the team were mindful of how this work could be informed by, and work with, the



INTO A WINNER

Wingrave's design takes a paladin aesthetic fused with very high-tech knight elements.

DESIGN ON DISPLAY

The game's character and environment design, which is using Unreal.

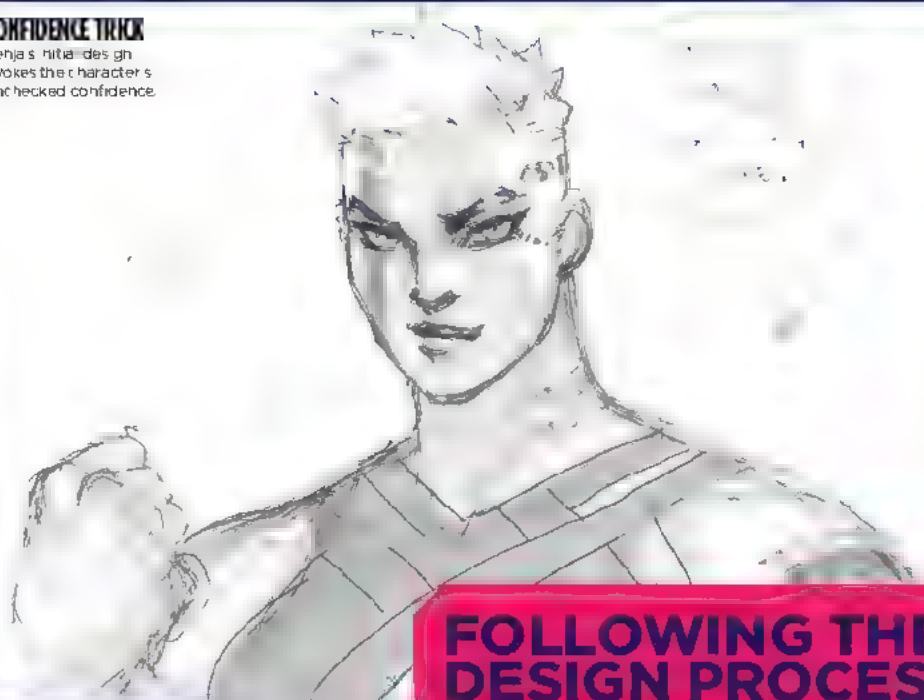


"I WILL
WIN THE
CROWD."



CONFIDENCE TRICK

Senja's initial design evokes the character's unchecked confidence.



FOLLOWING THE DESIGN PROCESS

From initial concept through to final design

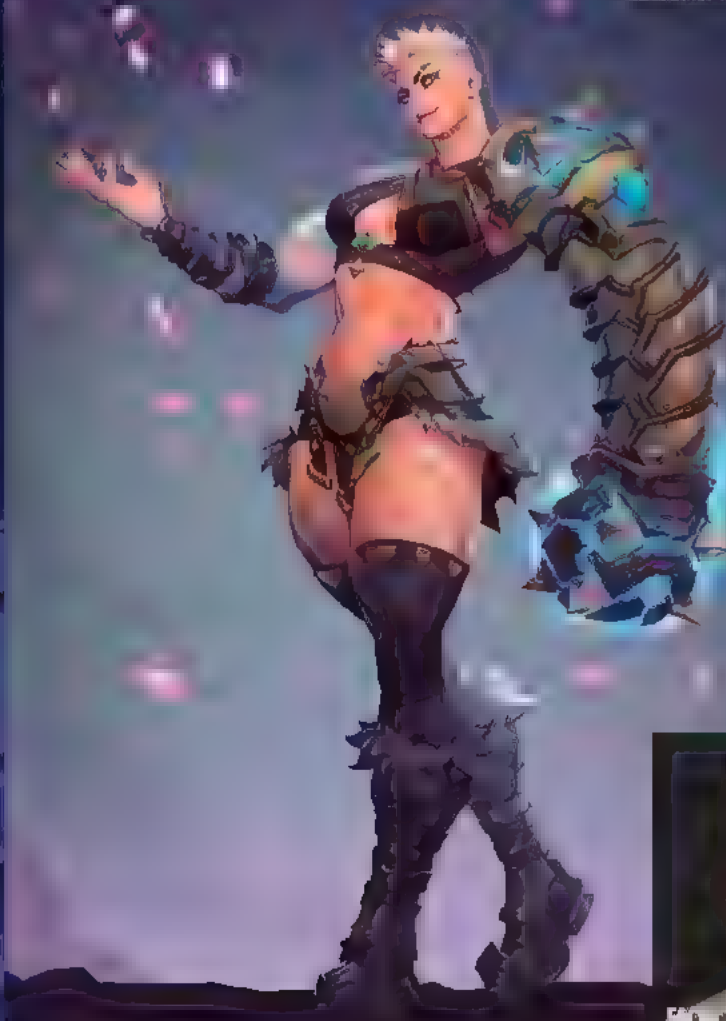
"It almost always starts with the basic design goals for the character. With the Wayfinders, we start by asking, 'What combat role are they fulfilling? Which archetype do they fall under?' For creatures, we'll ask, 'How many spawn at a time? How hard are they to kill? Do they use weapons or magical attacks? Where will you be fighting them, and are they too big for those spaces?' After that, our concept artists will do loose explorations to find the right vibe, trying to keep each one fresh and not overlapping too much with creatures and characters we've done before.

Usually, I'll approve a direction and we move to a tighter production concept, which we create a 3D blockout from. Animation then looks for potential issues with the design from a rigging and animating perspective, sometimes creating simple animations as part of the test, and then we move to final 3D art: sculpting, textures and materials, and so on.

"For most of the Wayfinders, I'll often do some loose explorations or a close-up face or bust of the character just to get the general idea across, and sell the idea to some of the other stakeholders on the team. I also like to start with the face because it helps me figure out their personality and informs the rest of the design. Not everyone works this way, but I like it."

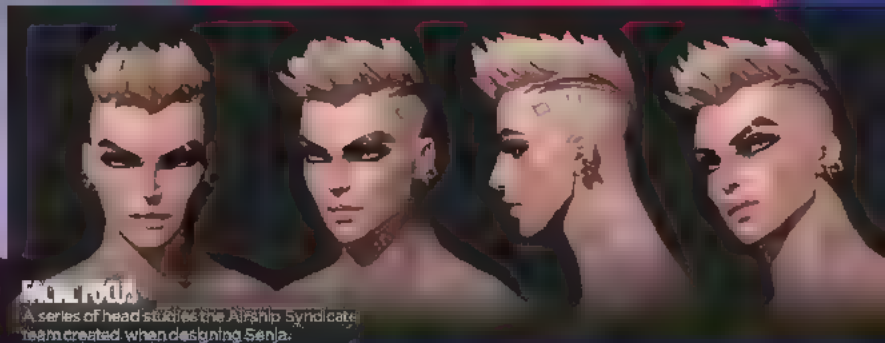
MAD INSPIRATION

Senja resonates with the design influence of Joe Mad on the project.



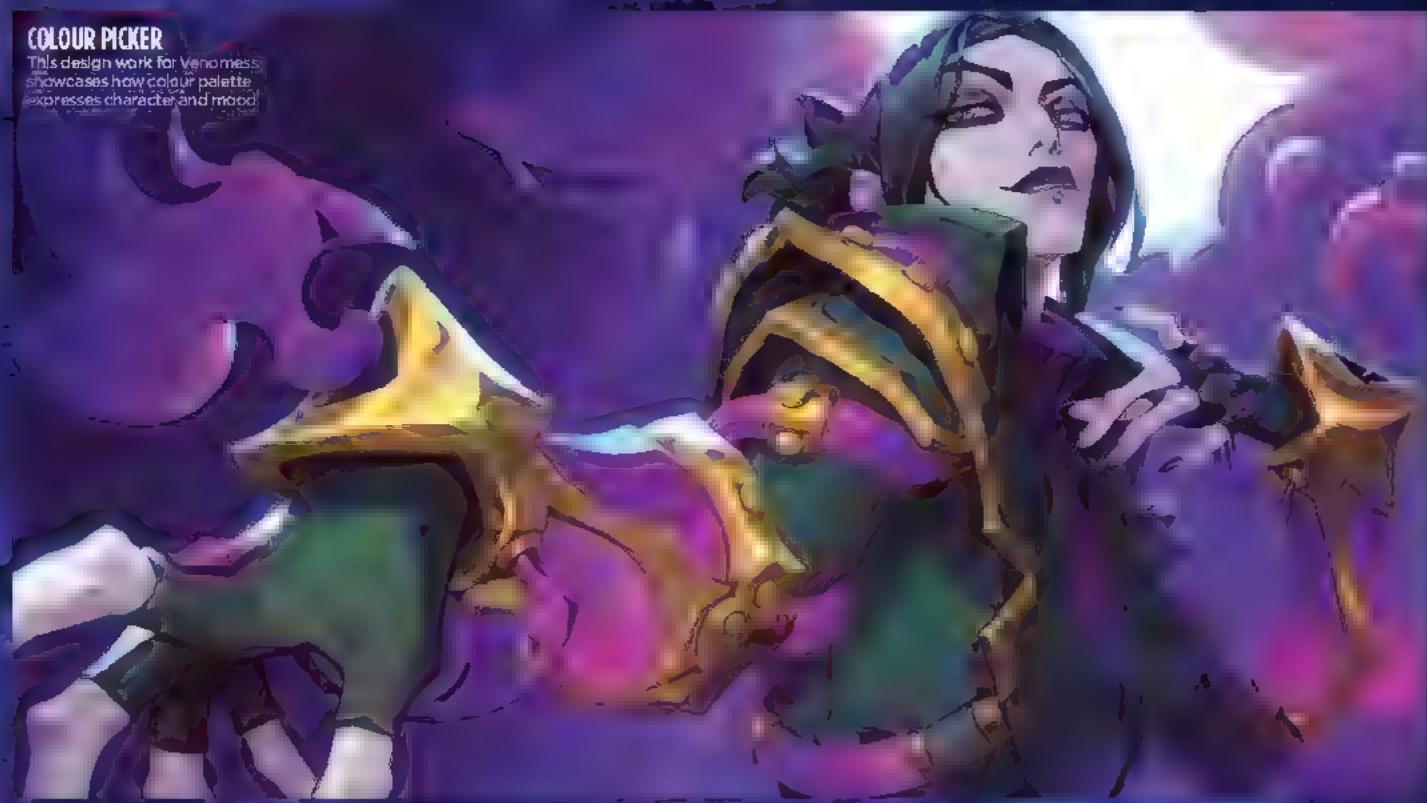
FACE THE FOCUS

A series of head studies the Airship Syndicate team created when designing Senja.



COLOUR PICKER

This design work for Venomess showcases how colour palette expresses character and mood.



environment design, Joe explains. "It doesn't affect our player characters as much since they need to look good and be able to manoeuvre in any environment, but for creatures, we like them to look more integrated into the environment and feel like they belong. We'll try to keep their colour range complementary to the places that you encounter them. We also have to be

mindful of how they move, their attacks and size so they don't get stuck on things and look like dummies or become exploitable by players!

WORLDBUILDING

Brian adds a further key point, "I think it influences a lot based on lore," he says. "We're trying to build out a whole world and in doing so, the lore drives the visuals of the environments and the creatures are living within that world. The best example of that comes from the Gloom."

"Where the Gloom have heavily crossed over, you will see that it's

also corrupting and reshaping the environment. Also, the factions that live in each biome have visual cues that make them believable within their own settings."

The believability and richness of the environments is a point that lead concept artist Virginia Crichtfield is also keen to stress. "The environments are characters unto themselves," she says. "Outside of the Wayfinders, the environment is the character that the player will spend the most time with, and we spend a great deal of time designing and building its tone and mood, personality, and defining traits."

"We ask ourselves questions like, 'How old is it? What is its name? How did it come to be here? What does its backstory and future look like? Is it healthy, ill? Is it poor or is it opulent?' Those character-defining questions are amazing tools for your worldbuilding. These stories provide a home to our creatures and enemies, and contrast for our players."

Virginia's observation is a fitting one for our conversation to finish with, reminding us of just how powerful considerations of character are when generating and sparking creativity across the spectrum of storytelling and gameplaying needs. In turn, that design work will create a consistent and engaging universe that might just become a home for us to escape to whenever we feel the need. ■

Those character-defining questions are amazing tools for your worldbuilding



INITIAL STUDIES

These character studies for Venomess had a dark, dominant colour palette.

FINDING INSPIRATION FOR THE GAME'S LOOK

Onsets of Being Shipboard and onshore: female influence behind the decision to hitchhike in Westfield

Figure 1 consists of four line graphs arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each graph plots the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take more or less action to reduce global warming against the percentage of respondents who believe global warming is a serious problem. The x-axis for all graphs ranges from 0% to 100% in 10% increments. The y-axis for all graphs ranges from 0% to 100% in 10% increments. The top row of graphs shows the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take more action (solid line) and the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take less action (dashed line). The bottom row of graphs shows the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take more action (solid line) and the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take less action (dashed line). The top-left graph shows that as the percentage of respondents who believe global warming is a serious problem increases, the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take more action also increases. The top-right graph shows that as the percentage of respondents who believe global warming is a serious problem increases, the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take less action decreases. The bottom-left graph shows that as the percentage of respondents who believe global warming is a serious problem increases, the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take more action also increases. The bottom-right graph shows that as the percentage of respondents who believe global warming is a serious problem increases, the percentage of respondents who believe the U.S. should take less action decreases.



MOTION SKETCH

A concept sketch that details the character of
\$10 in motion

THE ART OF BETSY BAUER

Dominic Carter talks to the artist about character design, working with Disney, and communicating personality



Betsy Bauer likes to keep busy. When not working with Disney on *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures*, she's teaching at the College for Creative Studies and completing work for clients such as DreamWorks, Sony and Paramount. Fortunately for us, she found time to reveal how she got into character design, and her approach to the craft.

Tell us a little about your background as an artist. How did you get started, and what has your career been like so far?

I grew up in the Midwestern US in a tiny town called Wadsworth, Ohio, so I was very removed from the entertainment industry as a kid. I didn't know anyone who was making a living as an artist. But, I think like most animation artists from my generation, I was inspired by the 90s

Disney renaissance, and learned from all of the 'making-of' TV specials that there were actually teams of artists who got paid to make these movies!

I'm lucky to have had supportive parents who believed in my dream, and they helped me to find a good school to launch my career. I ➤➤

MAKING MAGIC

Betsy's beautiful illustrations help to whisk readers off to different worlds like this fantasy kingdom.



W Like most animation artists from my generation, I was inspired by the 90s Disney renaissance //

➔ studied computer animation at the Ringling College of Art and Design, and since graduating in 2011 have had the privilege of working with a lot of the major studios including Disney, DreamWorks, and Nickelodeon

How has your art developed, and what has driven those changes?

When I came out of school, I think I was really focused on character design. I'm still mostly thought of as a character designer, and still feel most at home when doing character design, but I wanted to round myself out as an artist to become more comfortable designing environments and keyframe illustrations to open up career growth opportunities like art directing

good at when I got to art school, and naturally just wanted to pursue it because it felt easy.

When I learned more about what it took to be a character designer for real I still enjoyed it, but found it more challenging. You have to create an appealing drawing, yes, but you also have to find visual shortcuts to tell the audience as much as you can about that character before they even speak. It's much harder than it looks, and I still have a lot to learn.

What is your approach to designing a character?

A lot of my process depends on how much time a production gives

It's been nice to be able to stretch my creative muscles by doing a number of different things over the years //

Right now, I'm thankful to be in my first leadership position on the Disney series *Young Jedi Adventures*, largely focusing on lighting and colour. It's been nice to be able to stretch my creative muscles by doing a number of different things over the years.

What made you want to specialise as a character designer?

I think for many people, characters are some of the first things they start out drawing. I remember recording episodes of *Pokemon* on VHS and pausing the TV so I could draw the characters exactly as I saw them, and I got pretty good at mimicking style and shapes early on. Because of this, it was one of the few things I felt like I was

me. If I'm on a project that will permit me to take an entire day to research, that's definitely the ideal scenario. I'll gather inspiring photos, find related characters, and might even cast an actor in my head who I think might be a good fit for the voice. I actually think that's a great shortcut for anyone who might be stuck on a character design. Visualising the right voice actor can sometimes place a character's design into a more contained spectrum.

Once I start drawing, sometimes I find it's helpful to do small, shape-based thumbnails, but other times I just start sketching. I do try to come up with as wide a variety as possible for my first pass, and then work with the art director to narrow the scope

MATERIAL GIRL

This rebellious character was from a piece that Betsy drew for Gallery1988's Shopping Mall's show

JOIN THE QUEUE

Betsy's contribution to Jerrod Maruyama's Smorgasbord show at Gallery1988



from there. Oftentimes the final design is a combination of several of those early variations.

How do you communicate the personality of your characters through their design?

This is a great question, and something that's hard to pinpoint. I think a lot of it is about putting yourself in the shoes of that character: Would this character stand this way? Would they dress this way? Make this facial expression in this way? Basically every visual choice should make sense and relate back to the character's taste. I think the best character designs make you think, "Ah, yes, I've met a person like that before."

Some of your work, including for *Star Wars: Young Jedi Adventures*, sees you interpreting established characters. How do you retain the essence of their designs while drawing them in your own style? *Young Jedi Adventures* is an interesting beast given that *Star Wars* is such an



Artist PROFILE

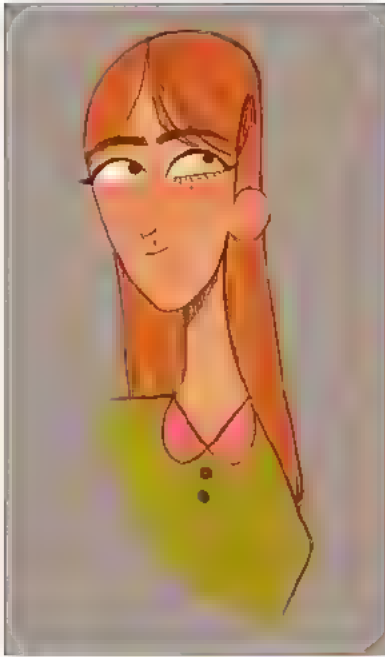
Betsy Bauer

LOCATION: US

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Enrique Fernandez, Jamie Hewlett, Mary Blair, Eyvind Earle

MEDIA: Procreate, Photoshop, pencils, watercolours

WEB: www.betsybauerart.com



HAPPY COUPLE

Betsy and her partner were the subject of these charming illustrations she drew for their wedding invites.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Even Betsy's older illustrations capture a lot of character in their expressions, shapes and clothing.

enormous IP, and there's a lot of pressure to do justice to the source material. In the end, it's up to Disney and Lucasfilm to give their blessing; if they think it works, it works!

I do think staying true to individual style is a bit of a myth in the heat of a production. In the end, we're working on the same thing, and we need to make sure the final product feels as though it's from one voice. Most of my personal work looks a bit different from work I do for a production.

What skills should an artist look to develop or hone if they want to get into character design?

Life drawing and caricature! Learn how to interpret gestures and create a shorthand for the figure. Learn how to exaggerate facial features and body proportions. All of those things directly translate into being a great character designer.

I recommend getting a cheap sketchbook, an ink pen, and sitting in a cafe to draw everyone who comes in. The pen is important; it will force you to commit to choices. A lot of the drawings will be bad at first, but that's totally okay. It's how everyone grows. Get the bad drawings out to make way for the good ones.

What's the best advice you've received?

A long time ago I super briefly worked with Shiyoon Kim →

BREAKING INTO THE WORLD OF CHARACTER DESIGN

Betsy Bauer explains what to keep in mind if you're trying to get started on the path to your dream career as a character artist.

1 Know that there's no timeline. Social media

can be a double-edged sword. It's easy to get discouraged when you see others' progress, but it's also a great way to stay motivated. I've seen people who started in the 30s, and even a handful in their 40s.

2 Stay consistent. Styles come and go. What's

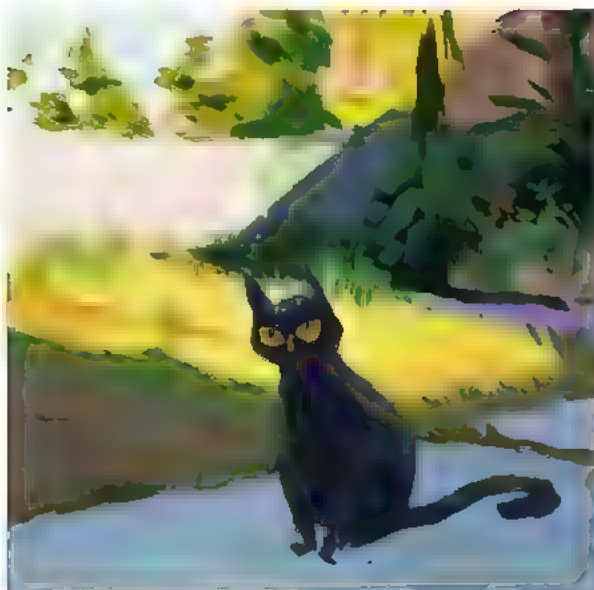
important is to keep drawing. I've seen people who started in the 30s, and even a handful in their 40s.

3 Build core skills.

Core skills are the foundation of your art. They're the things that you can rely on when you're working on a project.

4 Be persistent. You won't get it right the first time. You won't get it right the second time. You won't get it right the third time. But you will get it right by the end of the project.

5 Have fun! The



➡ on a development project at Sony, and he told me to design a character from the inside out. What he meant by that was thinking almost like an animator as you design a character; you should develop their personality, their little eccentricities and tics, before you commit to a final set of shapes for them

I don't think I ever hit exactly what he was talking about, but I've thought about it a lot. It takes a character from feeling like a generic regurgitation of shapes that we've all seen before and adds a level of specificity. Not a person, but this person.

What advice would you give to aspiring character designers? The industry is always changing, and one person's break may not be an avenue anymore. That said, there are three main things you can do

First, have a strong body work. If your work isn't ready, none of the other items in this list will matter.

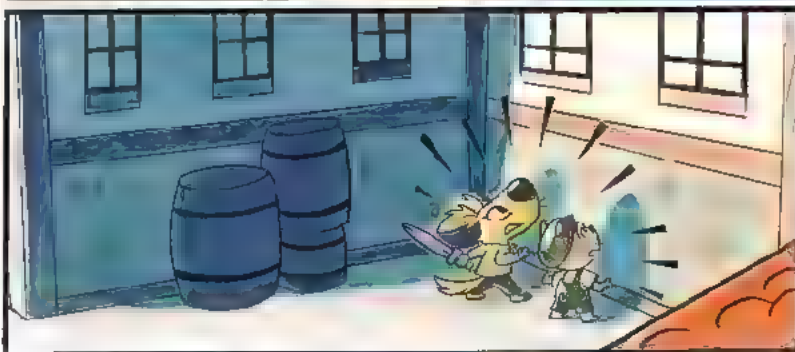


CAT'S EYES

This study created from a friend's photo expresses the cat's character through powerful lighting and by focusing on its facial features

NOVEL IDEA

These panels are a glimpse into a personal graphic novel project that Betsy pitched a couple of years ago



W I'd love to do a graphic novel one day, and have several half-finished proposals sitting in a Google Drive folder **//**

Second, tell people that you and your work exist. This could be through social media, submitting to job postings, or directly messaging studio recruiters and art directors.

Third, make in-person connections. Conventions like LightBox Expo allow you to put a face to your name, and can help move your name to the top of hiring shortlists when studios are looking to staff up a new project. Make connections with other artists who are breaking in too; they'll become your working peer group one day.

Finally, don't give up! If your work isn't quite ready yet but you implement the feedback you receive into your next portfolio submission, that can speak volumes about your willingness to be a team player, which is a huge part of working in animation!

What's next for you? Do you have any exciting projects coming up, or are there areas you'd like to explore? Gosh, that's a great question! Right now I feel pretty tired. I'm planning to stay through the end of Young Jedi Adventures, whenever that may be, and I'm also an assistant professor at an art school called the College for Creative Studies. Both of those things keep me pretty busy, and any free time I happen to get right now has mostly been devoted to hanging out with my husband and two needy dogs.

I keep telling everyone I'd love to do a graphic novel one of these days, and I have several half-finished proposals sitting in a Google Drive folder, waiting for me to return. So hopefully I'll get a window of time where I can work on one of those soon. ■

SAD SKATER GIRL

Here Betsy contrasts the character's tearful expression with bold, yet cool, colour choices.

GHIBLI GALLERY

Betsy created this illustration for the My Neighbor Totoro pop-up show at POW! WOW! in Honolulu.



MY NEIGHBOR TOTORO

Betsy explains how she captured a sense of wonder in this painting

When I start any new painting, I always think about what it is that makes me excited to paint it. In this case, I was trying to create something for a group gallery show celebrating the films of Hayao Miyazaki. I didn't discover My Neighbor Totoro until college, but something about the combination of a forested village with giant, benevolent monsters felt like the things I daydreamed about when I was a kid.

I started with loose sketching. If I was doing this for a client I'd probably create 6-10 tight thumbnails, but since it was essentially just for me, I kept it loose and only did around three or four until I hit the emotional core I knew I was trying to hit.

My next step was to create a document at the final resolution and aspect ratio, then to upscale the thumbnail to fit in those parameters. Then I lowered the opacity on the super-stretched thumbnail and started working on a tight drawing on a layer on top. Once the drawing is complete, usually I do a pass called flatting, where I lay down the major shapes and work out the local colours of each compositional element, basically working out the image graphically before adding any real sense of lighting. Once the image is working in flat colours, I use Multiply and Overlay layers to add a lighting pass. This is where the image really starts to come to life.

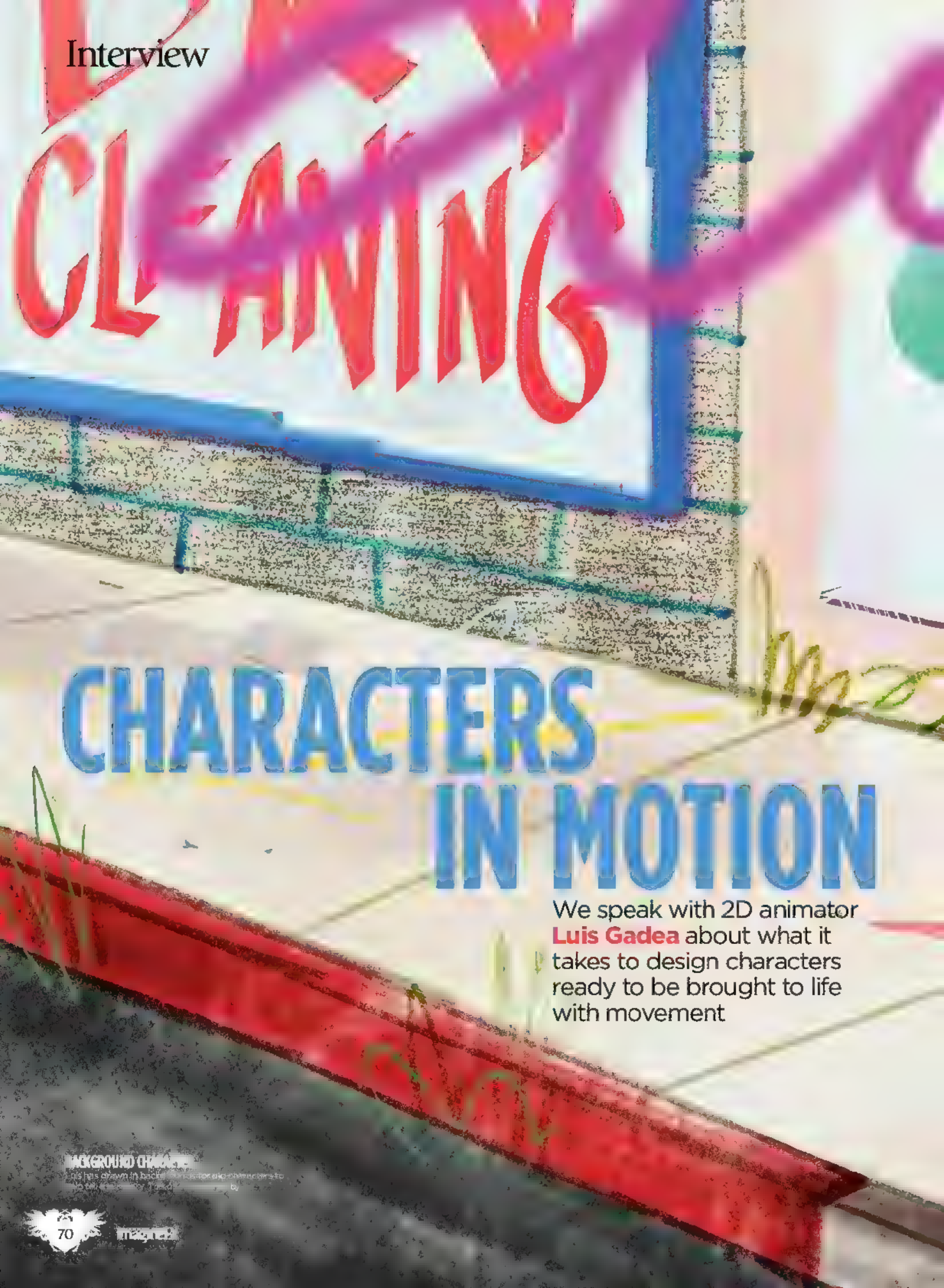
Breaking this down step-by-step helped me improve drastically, and makes painting a full image less intimidating. If you struggle painting full compositions, break down your process and solve one problem at a time.

FANTASTIC FAN ART

These drawings of Xan and Luna are based on one of Betsy's favourite books: The Girl Who Drank the Moon.



Interview



CHARACTERS IN MOTION

We speak with 2D animator **Luis Gadea** about what it takes to design characters ready to be brought to life with movement

BACKGROUND CHARACTER

Luis has drawn in background for his animation projects and he tells us how he does it



Designing a static character is an art in itself, but what about those that need to come to life via animation? This is the speciality of Luis Gadea, and his career has seen him design characters for the likes of DreamWorks TV, Warner Bros. Animation and Netflix. We caught up with him to learn more about his work, and what artists need to keep in mind when making animated character designs.

Can you tell us a little about your background as an artist?

I'd draw from time to time, but it wasn't until I was 13 years old that I became more curious about it, and I expressed my desire to learn how to draw to my parents. This led to my mum finding some manga classes for me on Saturday mornings, and I then took a second one on caricature.

After this I started drawing properly every single day. I was now in high school and quickly became 'the guy who drew'. During high school I never thought of pursuing art as a living, I just enjoyed it and had a lot of fun drawing silly ideas around characters.

Later on I joined Costa Rica's only university that had an animation programme, and became interested in 3D pre-production. During my first year of university, one of my professors hired me to work in his studio as a 2D animator and I fell in love with the medium. I immediately knew that I wanted to do this, so I left university and moved to Vancouver to study classical animation at Vancouver Film School. This was one of the best decisions I've made in my entire life. I felt I belonged there.

After graduating I started working as a 2D animator for a TV show. There I learned how a real production works, all the ups and downs of the entire

Artist PROFILE



Interview

FARMER'S MARKET GIRL

This character started out as an in-person study, but evolved into something even more fun



➡ process. In my spare time I'd keep drawing characters in my sketchbook, it was all I did every single day

After a couple of years doing 2D animation I got a call from LA for a job as a character designer on The Angry Birds Movie. It was a surprise because I wasn't looking for it, and while it was something I loved, I never thought it'd happen. That movie opened doors for me in the character design world

The characters that I made in the first couple of weeks were terrible, I thought I was going to get fired, but somehow I survived and kept going. I was super lucky. It completely changed the way I saw the characters and I was surrounded by super talented artists, so I got to see my heroes at work and learn from them.

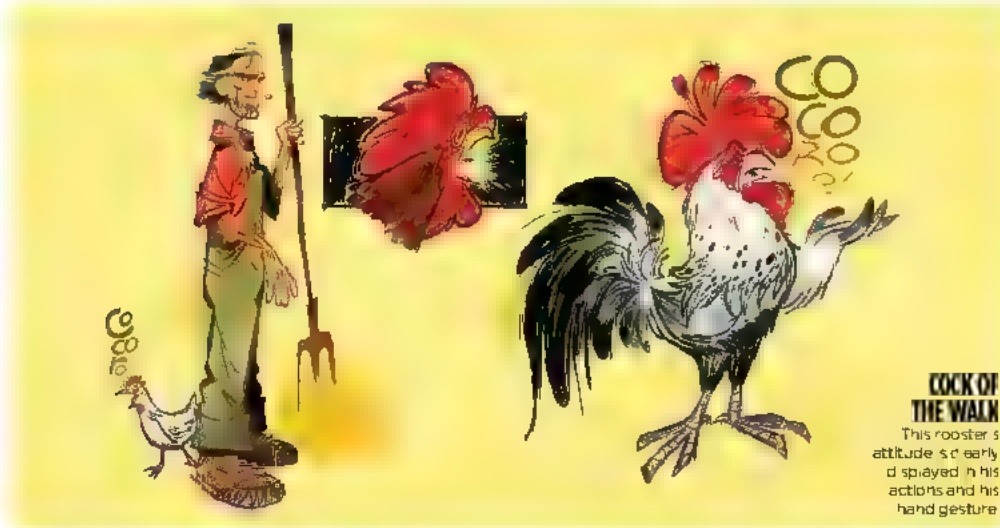
Since then I've been doing character designs for very cool projects. I've also helped to create line-ups of characters for development teams, and work on feature films and TV shows. It's been a fun ride, and it's taught me a lot both professionally and personally

What made you want to specialise as a character designer for animation?

To be completely honest, I never actually looked for it. It came to me by luck. I was never into drawing backgrounds; even as a teenager, I always preferred characters and their ideas. When I first started out as a 2D animator, I realised I felt really happy doing it. I'd spend an extra bit of time working on the characters, pushing ideas for their expressions and mouth shapes, and trying to push their craziness even further.

In my spare time I would draw all kinds of characters in my sketchbook. I remember trying out all sorts of styles and ideas. I was counting down the hours to when I could leave work and run home to draw even more characters. I used Blogspot at the time

“ I thought I was going to get fired, but somehow I survived and kept going ”



COCK OF THE WALK

This rooster's attitude is clearly displayed in his actions and his hand gesture

CHARACTER CLOTHING

What character's wear can tell people just as much about them as their designs. I'm experimenting with colour here



and posted my characters there almost every day. That was how the character art director on The Angry Birds Movie found me, and thanks to that project other doors opened for me. Ever since that movie I've been doing characters. My goal was to design characters, but I knew I needed to wait for it. Basically I was in the right place at the right time, but it was also good to know my blog was actually working!

How do you generate ideas for character designs, or does it all evolve from the brief?

I've been fortunate to have worked in different circumstances. For example if I get a brief or a script with a description of what I need to do in terms of characteristics then I have a good starting point to go from. Other times I've been in the position where the client has an actor in mind, so that allows me to design a character based on their specific personality. I've also been tasked with designing a character from scratch, which permits me to explore random ideas until we land on a specific path

Having said that, I'm a fan of shapes and rough drawings, so I normally start by drawing them. Quick body shapes and poses dictate to me ➡



GOOD AS GOLD

These character designs were made by Luis for the short film *Golden Age*.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

In this study, Luis is trying out different facial features for a story he has been putting together.

HOW TO DESIGN FOR ANIMATION

Luis on the considerations needed for creating animated characters

1 Think about shapes. They don't have to be simple, but the idea is to build your character out of shapes. Whether it's a 2D or 3D product on, this will help the animators to understand how to draw the character and the modellers to build it.

2 Think about the silhouette of your characters. With the shapes you build the silhouette. So make this outline interesting and ask yourself, 'Can I make an iconic silhouette?'

3 Pay attention to the hands if the character is human. Hands tell audiences so much about a character and we all use them to express ourselves. If you have a hard time drawing hands, use your own as a reference for practising.

4 Be selective with a character's clothing. It can help make a character more interesting, and you can use it to reveal their personality.

5 This one is very personal, but I like to make my designs asymmetrical. Somehow it makes them more relatable and interesting. I personally don't like to create 'perfect' drawings.



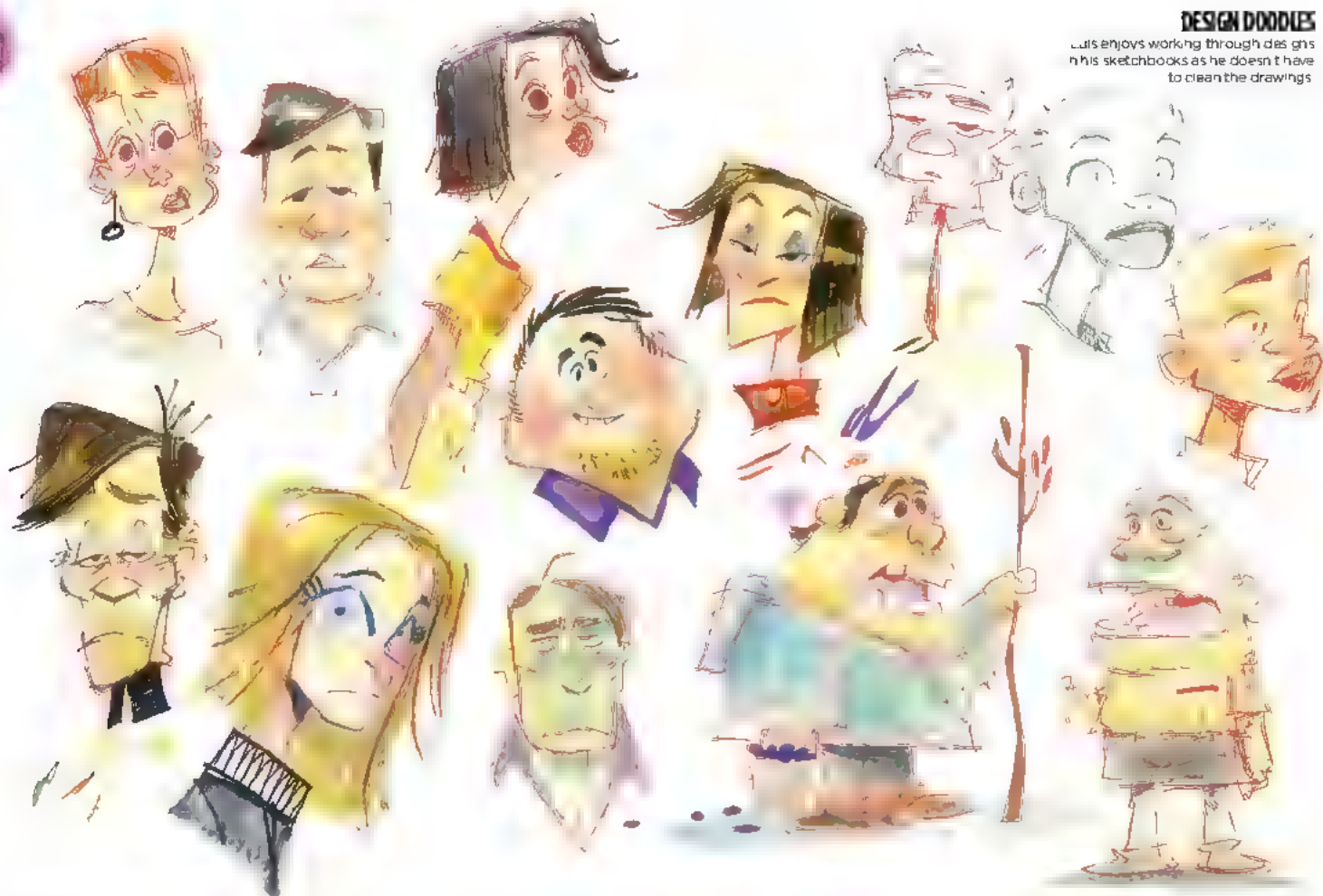
ANIMAL MAGIC

Luis's character designs aren't limited to people. Even animals like this cheetah can convey a variety of expressions.



DESIGN DOODLES

Luis enjoys working through designs in his sketchbooks as he doesn't have to clean the drawings



“ I might have a bunch of pieces from different sketches and put them together like a collage to create a new design ”

➡ whether the design is working or not I tend to keep every scribble I make and never throw away an idea, no matter how bad it may be. If I'm working digitally I duplicate the layer, lower the opacity of that design and draw on top of it. I love building a character from a rough sketch all the way to a finished design. It feels like the drawing is telling me which lines to follow with each pass.

If I'm starting on paper, it's much the same. I start by drawing rough ideas and move on from them if I feel I can improve them. I might leave them in a very rough stage, then scan and finish them in Photoshop. Sometimes I might rescue a head I drew on paper but start the body all over again digitally. I like to keep things moving and not be strict with how I work.

Sometimes I build characters like Frankenstein's monster; I might have a bunch of pieces from different sketches and put them together like a

collage to create a whole new design. This is always fun because I feel like a kid again. Once I have something I'm pleased with, I start adding details.

How do you go about interpreting characters for projects like Bugs Bunny Builders, Angry Birds and The LEGO Movie?

It's interesting to think about what you can bring to the table on every project. For Bugs Bunny Builders, I was hired to show my own take on the main characters. I wanted to mix some of the old cartoons with simplified forms. I did this by keeping the classic look of the faces and then stylising little elements here and there.

With the bodies though, I knew I needed to simplify them further to make them easy to draw. Originally I intended to go with a thick, bold outline for the clean-up, but we had to change that because it would mean more work during animation. But ➡

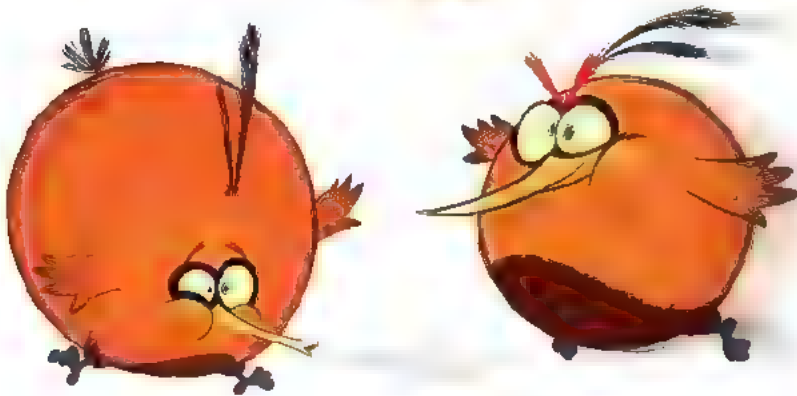


QUICK ON THE DRAW

A pencil and watercolour character for Western Stories shows her tough personality through her angular body language.

TEXTURE GIRLS

This pair of characters was designed in front of a live audience of viewers on a stream.



BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Luis was tasked with bringing familiar video game characters to life on the Angry Birds Movie.



FOR A COIN

In this drawing, Luis challenged himself by limiting the number of brushes he could use.

Interview

FASHION FIGURES

Everything from clothing to footwear to hairstyles gets the character of these people across.



➡ yeah, I started by analysing the original cartoons before moving on to paper sketches that revealed what should be stylised.

For Angry Birds I had a character art director, so my job was to adapt her style. In that situation, I suggest ideas for acting like poses and expressions. I was in charge of character packets, so I built all the rules of the characters for the 3D team to work with.

For The LEGO Movie 2, I was brought in by the production designer to actually not think about LEGO. He wanted me to think outside the rules and bring in ideas for the characters that a team of LEGO specialists would translate into real pieces. It was a fun task because I could push poses to sell a feeling and not a LEGO brick.

Ultimately, your interpretation of characters can be in the way you build them, make them act, and style elements in their design. There are

many opportunities to bring yourself and your takes to the table.

You have worked as a storyboard and clean-up artist. What did this teach you about character design?

The first thing it taught me was that I wanted to pursue character design and not storyboarding! That said, I have a huge amount of respect for storyboard artists because that's a very intense job. But I also learned a lot about understanding characters from different angles, and how to move them around in an efficient way. It also helped because, when you're storyboarding, you find the simplest shapes to describe the characters to make them readable, so you start understanding a lot about shapes.

In terms of the clean-up, I also remember how valuable it was, because when drawing the same character so many times you start to

“Not thinking about work on my days off gives me inspiration for the times I'm sitting down and drawing”



PLAYING WITH PROPORTION

Luis exaggerated and played with proportion to communicate this character's personality.



truly know when it is off or on model. This helps you to decide which line to clean and which one to leave.

What advice would you give to aspiring character designers hoping to follow in your footsteps?

First of all, remember to have fun! This will help you during the rough times. Yes, there are rules to follow, but at the end of the day it's a matter of enjoying what you're doing.

Also, remember this is a team effort. Yes, you can create the character, but without all the people in the other departments it would just be a simple drawing. So be open to collaboration and a team player.

The best thing about animation is collaborating with other artists and learning from them. When you see the finished result on the big screen, the feeling is indescribable. On a more emotional level, for your own sanity, give yourself permission to take breaks. Take a weekend off, go outside, meet your friends and explore nature, read a book and go to the movies. Not thinking about work on my days off gives me inspiration for the times I'm sitting down and drawing. ●

BOLD AMBITION

Drawing Mighty Eagle exploration poses was a highlight from Luis's time on the Angry Birds Movie.

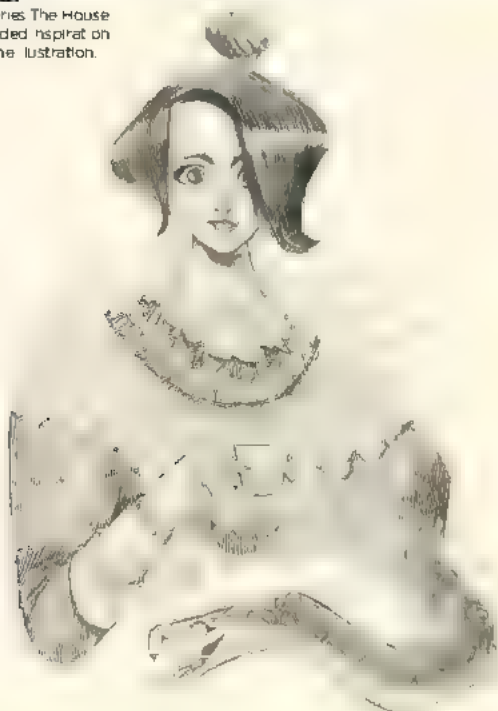


KEEPING IT LOOSE

Even with quick character studies like these, Luis is able to capture a distinct personality through his clever use of shapes.

FLOWER POWER

Dark comedy series The House of Flowers provided inspiration for this serpentine illustration.



BODIES

Luis talks through his series of figures, a change from his typical approach

This is one of my latest side projects. It emerged from a desire to draw with a different mindset. I started it in 2022 right before LightBox Expo, and I wanted my table at the convention to be something unusual, something unrelated to animation. I also wanted to work in a more artsy way and create something that would appeal to a bigger audience, so I did a few tests with various materials.

I started with watercolours, but this didn't work out because the colours weren't strong enough. I then tried gouache but wasn't happy with that either, so I tried acrylics. This was the right path, but I had to adapt to what the drawing was calling for. I did a bunch of tests that didn't work out and this allowed me to modify the shapes of the bodies. I kept them very simple in terms of the colour and used some outlines for specific areas. My instinct was to add more colours, but I needed to get away from my normal workflow. It's been fun bringing these characters into 2D animation, and with the Shout studio I'm creating them in 3D as well.



TAKING A SWING

How the movie's director Maxim "start with the unknown scene"

CATCH OF THE DAY

This fisherman is one of the daily sketches Kenneth posts to social media. Number 118/365 to be precise.



JUMP SCARE

Red panda attack! This illustration was made during a weekend workshop with Lynn Chen.



THE ART OF KENNETH ANDERSON

Dominic Carter talks to the artist about designing for young audiences and bringing illustrations to life



Working out of his business Character Cube, Kenneth Anderson has created character designs and illustrations for the likes of Nick Jr., Sesame Workshop and CBeebies. He tells us how his characters and stories work together, and how he captures them both in a single image.

How did you get started, and what has your career been like so far? I've been working as an artist since around 2005 and I've just realised that's almost 20 years ago. I didn't realise it's been so long!

I always knew I wanted to draw for a living and to work in animation in some capacity, so I studied animation at university up in Dundee, Scotland. I was lucky enough to start working fairly quickly after graduating, but my first job was as a junior 2D artist in a local games company.

I'd never considered working within games previously, but it totally made sense. I was obsessed with character-driven video games such as Monkey

“I had never considered working in games previously, but it totally made sense”

Island and Day of the Tentacle while I was growing up!

My career so far has been quite varied. I tend to go with the flow and see what happens, giving it little nudges in certain directions from time to time. I've worked in video games, I worked as an animator early on in my career, I've been designing characters as a freelancer since 2009, and more recently I've been doing a lot more illustration. I like keeping it varied! But at the same time, everything I do is very character focused.

What made you want to specialise in creating character designs for children's television?

While growing up, I was constantly drawing all sorts of weird characters. I remember in high school I wrote this stupid song, recorded it, burnt it to a CD, and then created a character as the singer for the sleeve art. I called him Jimmy Sausage; he was basically a cross between a sausage and Jimi Hendrix – I was going through a foodstuffs as characters phase at that point – and it was a big hit with a ➔

Artist PROFILE

Kenneth Anderson

LOCATION: UK

FAVOURITE ARTISTS: Bill Watterson, Nick Park

MEDIA: Photoshop, Procreate

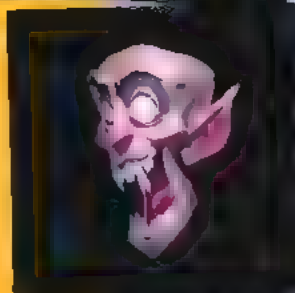
Col-Erase pencils

WEB: www.charactercube.com



PIRATE O'CLOCK

It's my job to help facilitate the discovery of the character to forge them on the page."



MONSTER MASH

Testing a design can be the most important step. "Knowing what isn't working is halfway to discovering what is."

mate of mine. I think my current career as a character designer just evolved out of that impulse to create silly characters and bring them to life.

I didn't realise, however, that I could actually get away with drawing characters as a living until I discovered Stephen Silver's work. Realising that there were artists out there whose job it was to design characters was an epiphany for me. Before this I didn't have a specific specialism in mind, but as soon as I realised that becoming a professional character designer was a thing, it all made sense.

The children's television role kind of happened by accident, I didn't really pursue it at all. But I think my style suits that medium well, so those clients gravitated towards me, and before I knew it the bulk of my work was coming from that world!

I have Dan Bays to thank for that. He was developing Bitz & Bob at the BBC at the time, and reached out to me for some character development. That became my first proper character design work for kids television and then things just snowballed from there. Thanks Dan!

LAND AHOY

Kenneth explains how he captured both a story and several characters in this personal project

This piece took me three years! I drew this sketch one year and created, mostly by accident, a really cool composition with the boat. But I started painting into it and I think my skill level wasn't ready for the image at the time. I got disheartened, distracted and forgot about it. I tried to get back into it a year later and failed again.

The following year I dusted it off and started again. I went back to the initial sketch and composition I loved, but re-problem solved the characters and the lighting, and then things started to flow better. Sometimes taking time to think is a necessary part of the process, so I don't be afraid to put an image aside and come back to it.

It was important to figure out a cool story moment for the piece, and in this case the composition dictated that. The only thing that made sense was the characters discovering a long lost island.

Once I had that idea in mind I drew everything to fit; the kid with the map pointing, them all looking off into the distance. The angle also added to the excitement and energy of the moment. I wanted all of the other characters to be supporting that main idea but all doing something different.

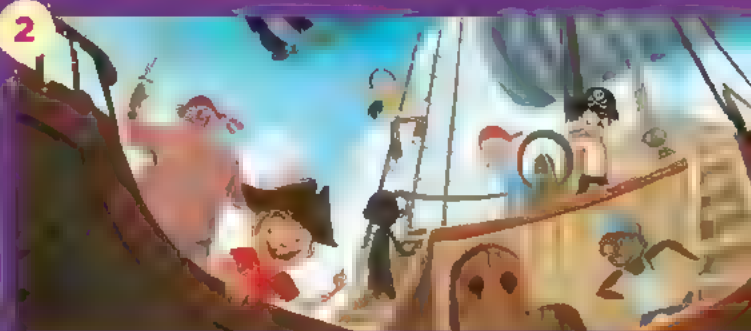
Again, the story also dictated the scene's lighting. I wanted the warm, almost setting sun to be casting a warm glow over the characters. They made it.

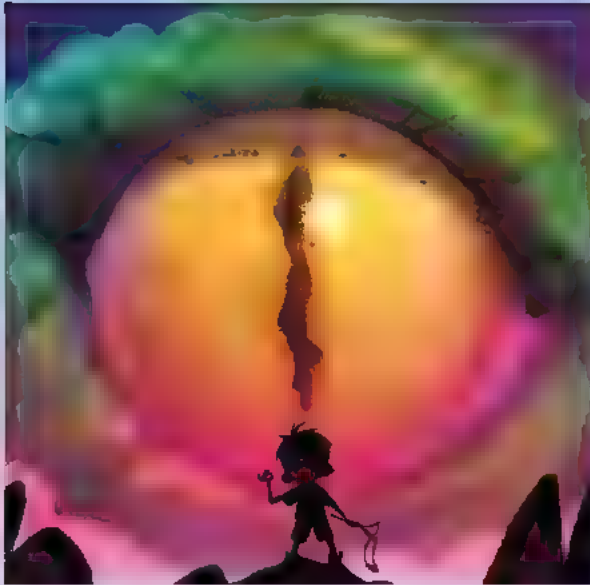
“The children’s television role happened by accident, I didn’t really pursue it at all”



AM FEAR LIATH MÖR

"I often design characters to help tell a story. I'm trying to capture them in the act of something."





How is designing characters for younger audiences different to creating them for adults?

There are some obvious things you can't do with characters for younger audiences: nothing sexualised, no smoking and drinking, avoid weapons and such, although that does depend on the age of the audience. With designing for adults, pretty much anything goes I guess, within reason.

From a pure design point of view, the younger audiences will generally respond best to certain design choices, cuter, softer, more colourful characters for example, with bigger heads. They seem to be the way to go! Basically, I think the younger the audience, the more stylised you can go with your designs, almost into pure abstraction. Almost but not quite

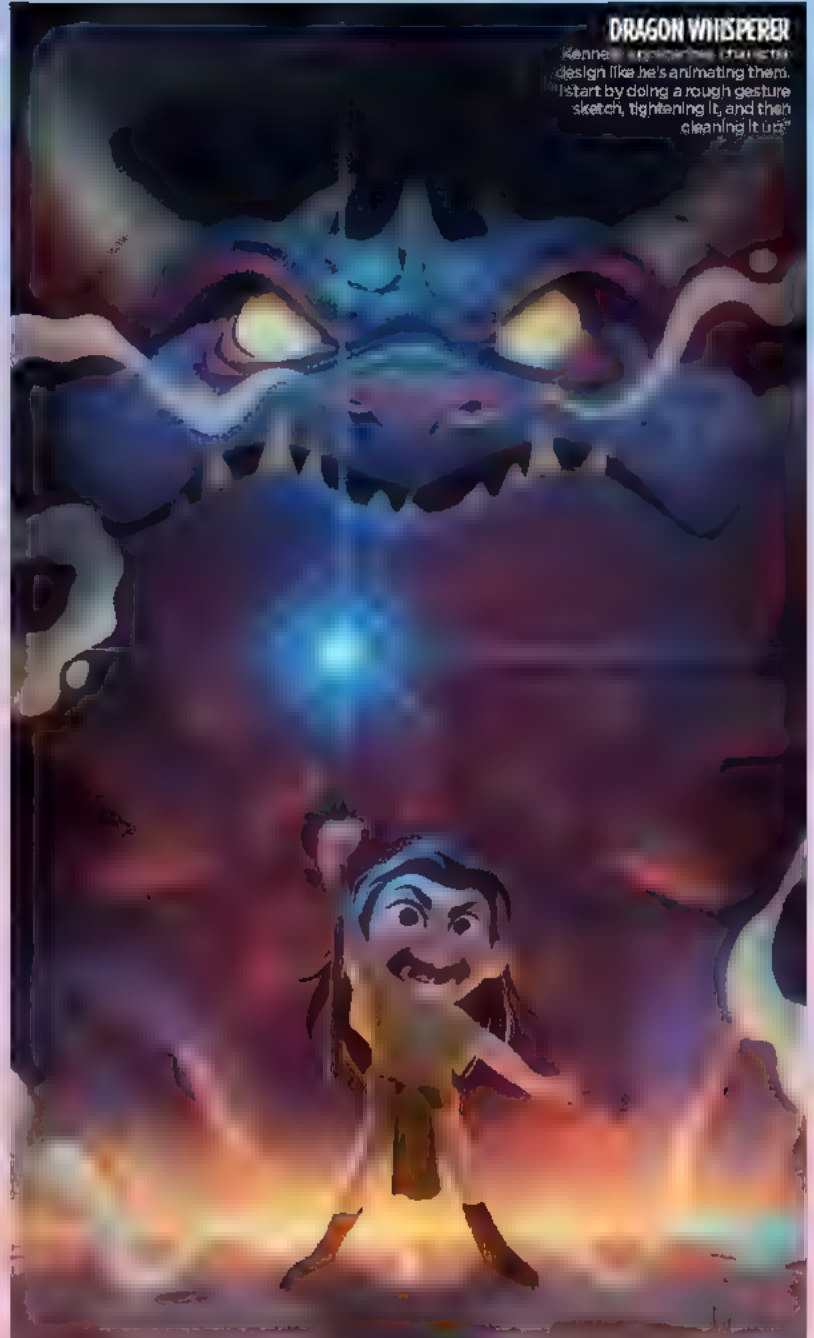
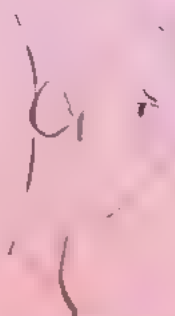
When it comes to the adults, as a general rule, you want to design more realistic characters, which have more natural proportions, although they can still be stylised. But this will really depend on the nature of the story that's being told. And of course you can subvert the younger audience style and adapt it for an adult audience,

EYE ON THE PRIZE

Working in animation helped hone Kenneth's ideas. "A good design will be optimised for performance."

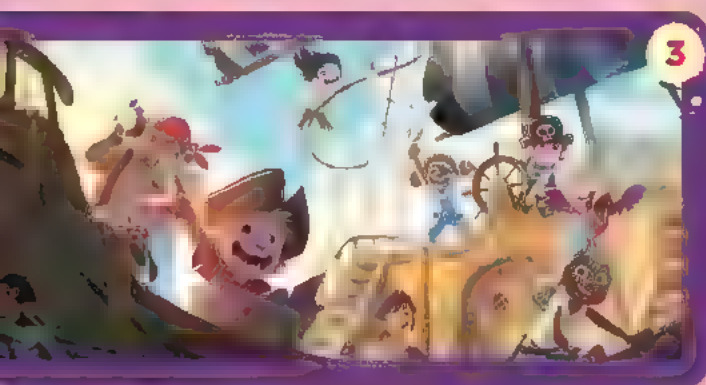
DAILY DOODLE

Kenneth draws the sketches he likes this from the comfort of his sofa



DRAGON WHISPERER

Kenneth approaches character design like he's animating them. "I start by doing a rough gesture sketch, tightening it, and then cleaning it up."



usually for comedic effect. Shows such as Happy Tree Friends and South Park do this well

But from a personal point of view, I think I'm tapping into different parts of my psyche depending on the nature of the job. If I'm designing for kids, I'm definitely channelling my inner child, remembering my childhood, the things I used to do as a kid, the things that made me happy and bringing all of that into my work.

If I'm ever designing stuff for adults, and I do dabble in personal work that has darker themes and energy, then I'm tapping into the different, darker experiences from my life, and the way I draw will reflect that

You recently illustrated Clarity Jones and the Magical Detective Agency. What's it like creating characters in collaboration with an author? It's fun! Chris Smith, the author, is great in that he always has a clear idea of what he imagines his characters look like. Then it's up to me to try and represent that on the page while giving my own spin to it.

The thing I like is that an author seems mostly invested in finding the character from a story point of view, there's something pure about that. Whereas in animation there's often that voice saying, "Can this character be made into a mass-market toy?" So yeah, generally there are fewer ➔

Interview



COOL CABIN BOY

Pirates are a recurring theme in Kenneth's portfolio. This one was drawn after experiencing withdrawal.

➡ restrictions or voices to please when designing a book character. There can be a bit of back and forth when trying to find the right design, but not as much as in animation.

Also, it's freeing not having to worry about any technical restraints when designing for a book. There's no need to worry about if the character is animatable or how long a design will take to model rig and render, so it's really quite refreshing in that sense.

Tell us about the illustrations you draw every day on social media. Basically, last year I posted like five times or something. I seem to be a man of extremes. So this year I said, "Right, I'm going to post more!" I knew if I aimed to do one drawing every week or so I would forget, lose track and fail. So I went all in and committed to a drawing a day, so it's less easy to forget.

I really wanted to draw something every day just for me and nobody else; no clients giving me any feedback or asking for changes. My drawing, my rules. It's important to have a creative outlet outside of work, and to just draw for fun.

Doing this, I've learned to let go a bit and not be a perfectionist. I know I'm not posting my best work every day. Some days I only have literally 30 seconds spare to draw something. But

💧 It's important to have a creative outlet outside work, and to just draw for fun 💧

MEETING MEALTA

Working on computer games and super-stylised characters helped push Kenneth's designs in new directions.



PIRATE SHIP HO!

"Currently, I'm doing more illustration work and find myself consciously trying to get looser and more impressionistic."

KENNETH'S TIPS FOR CHARACTER CREATION

The artist shares advice on what illustrators should pay attention to when designing book characters.

1. Think about the character's personality and how you can convey that through their design. It's important to have a clear idea of who the character is before you start drawing.
2. Have fun with the character. Don't be too serious. It's okay to experiment and try different things. The more you have fun, the more creative you will be.
3. Pay attention to the character's proportions. Make sure they look like a real person, even if they are a fantasy character. Proportions are key to making a character believable.
4. Even though your characters are going to be in a book, it's important to make them look like they belong in the real world. Give them some realistic details, like clothing and accessories.
5. Don't be afraid to use color. Color can be a great way to make a character stand out and to convey their personality. Use color wisely and don't overdo it.



KEEPING IT COOL

This minty fresh character is number 101 out of 365 in Kenneth's diary of daily doodles.

I realised I needed to take the pressure off myself to always be making great art. I would much rather be drawing something than nothing! It's also a great outlet to experiment and try to synthesise new styles into my work. And I think that, just by drawing every day, I've started to improve my work in little ways too.

What's the last character you saw that made you think, "I wish I'd designed that?" Every time I scroll through Instagram I see a character that makes me think that, from so many different artists! James Woods' characters usually have that effect on me.

I do love some of the dragon designs from *How to Train Your Dragon*, especially the Bewilderbeast. I'm a fan of Nico Marlet's work. And I love the design of Gromit from *Wallace and Gromit* as well. He's so simple yet so endearing and lovable and full of life.

Also, there is a piece of concept art out there on the web of the ghost pirate LeChuck from *Monkey Island* that I love. I don't think the concept translated exactly into the video games, but it's so cool; the shapes, the proportions, the upside down dead bird used as plumage in his pirate hat. LeChuck is the reason I draw so many pirate zombies.

What advice would you give to aspiring character designers who are hoping to follow in your footsteps?

Well, there have never been more opportunities to design characters for

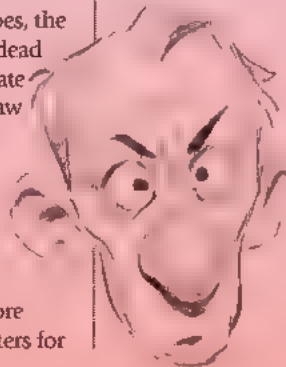


UNLIKELY HERO

These days Kenneth is working on his own ideas, including comic books, novels, and graphic novels.

ON THE NOSE

Kenneth has long been fascinated by how Bill Watterson and Nick Park use humour to bring characters to life.



a living than you'll find now. That said, I think it's important to have a diverse skill set, as not all my work is pure character design. I do illustration, prop design, comics, whatever I need to do to pay the bills.

So I'd recommend building up your skill set, especially early on in your career. Be prepared for a long, hard slog, and start out by not doing your dream job. Everything is a stepping stone and will give you the experience that you can draw upon throughout the rest of your career.

Also, don't neglect the meat and veg of character design. The turnarounds, expression sheets and all the rest of the

technical stuff are important skills for you to develop as a character designer. Part of the character designer's job is to create and design for a specific purpose with technical restraints and a production pipeline.

Lastly, don't give up! Don't let hard work, turnarounds, or AI scare you out of becoming a character designer. Character design is about more than just creating something that looks pretty or cool. It's about storytelling, it's about putting a little piece of your soul into a drawing and bringing it to life, and touching the heart and mind of some little kid somewhere watching Saturday morning TV. 🐉

Studio focus

EXPLORE ARTWORK FROM INDUSTRY-LEADING TEAMS

Grafit Studio

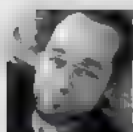
LOCATION: Armenia

WEB: www.artstation.com/grafit

Grafit Studio is an outsourcing art studio based in Armenia with a team of over 100 artists. Since 2007, they have provided a variety of commercial art services including marketing art, illustration, concept art, visual development, 3D work and more.

"We're passionate about art and want to make our contribution to the art community in many ways," they say. "We own a photo studio where we create reference packs for both selling and for using in our internal and commercial projects. Our team strongly believes using photos is great for learning and developing art skills, and for making efficient commercial pipelines."

"Another key milestone was launching Grafit Academy with online courses for CG artists. We've built up massive experience of commercial work, with many of our artists working here for more than five years. Art outsourcing is still our main focus, but we're open to any opportunities and challenges!"



MICHAEL BABKIN

1 SWAMP KNIGHT

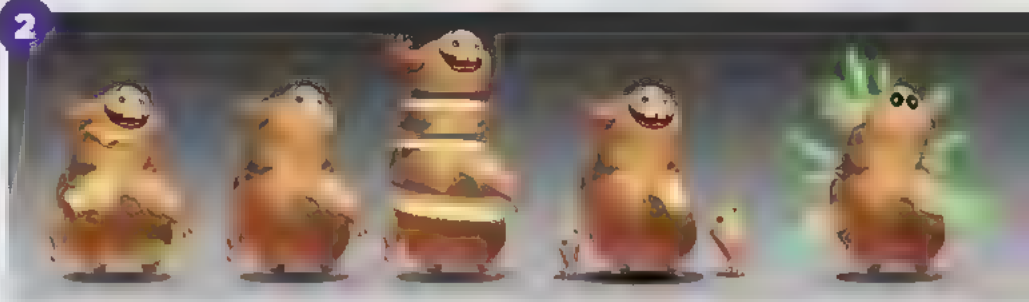
A character concept that we created for one of our projects! What would a swamp knight look like in this world? Michael gave us the answer!

2 POTATO PAL

Any object can be an inspiration. What if the potato met some swamp magic or was bitten by a radioactive spider?

3 MEET THE TEAM

An illustrated look at the Grafit team. Pay a visit to our office to meet us!





3



4



5



6



WALDEMAR KAZAK

4 MERMAIDS

We celebrated MerMay together with the art community, which is how this beautiful illustration came to life.

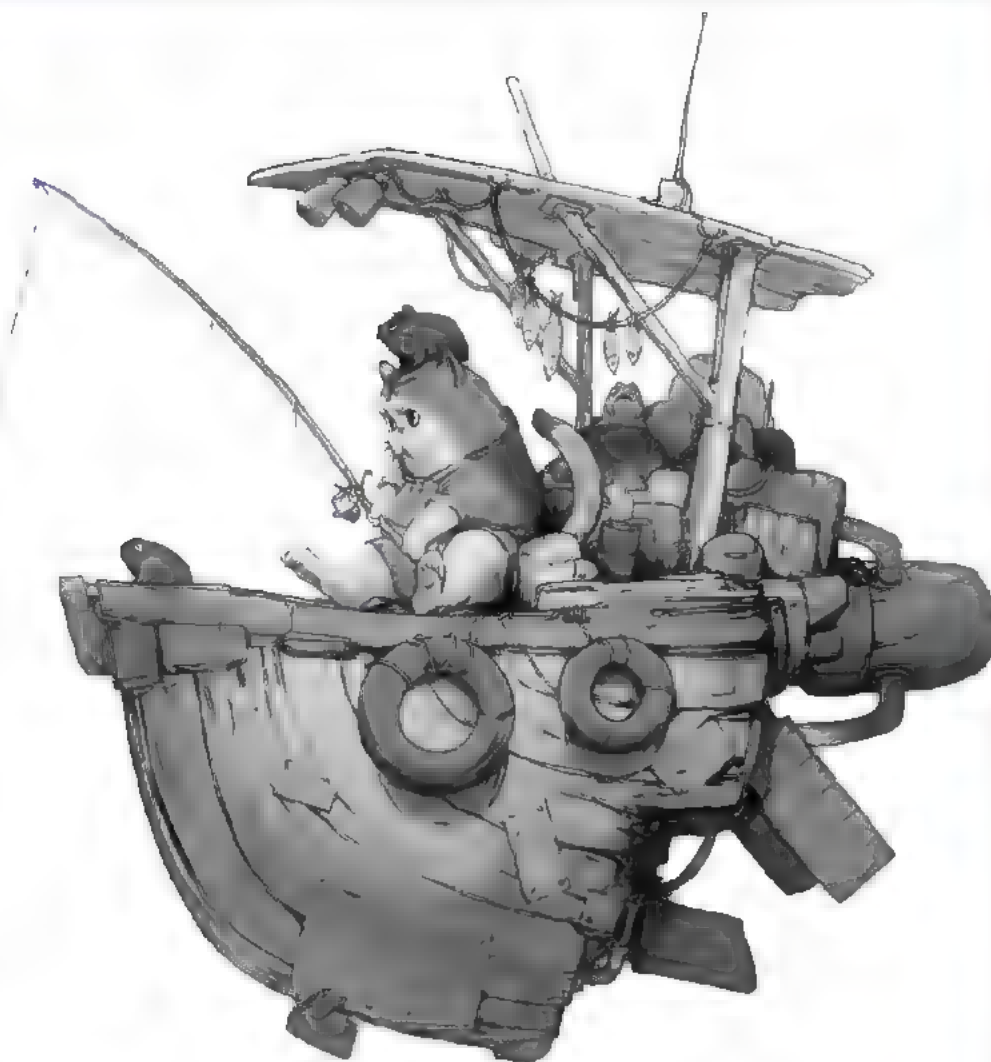
5 SAMURAI

An exploration of different styles using our reference packs, thanks to our awesome friend Waldemar.

6 PIRATE QUEEN

Working with studies never ends. Here Waldemar tried to exaggerate the character and catch the emotion and movement.

7



VIKTOR TITOV

7 STUDY WORK

Studies from our art director Viktor always have interesting details. Is this a new space cowboy, from far away and long ago?

8 INKTOBER SUPERHERO

We love superhero girls, from their lips and nails to their suits and hips. Here, another monster has been defeated for Inktober.

8





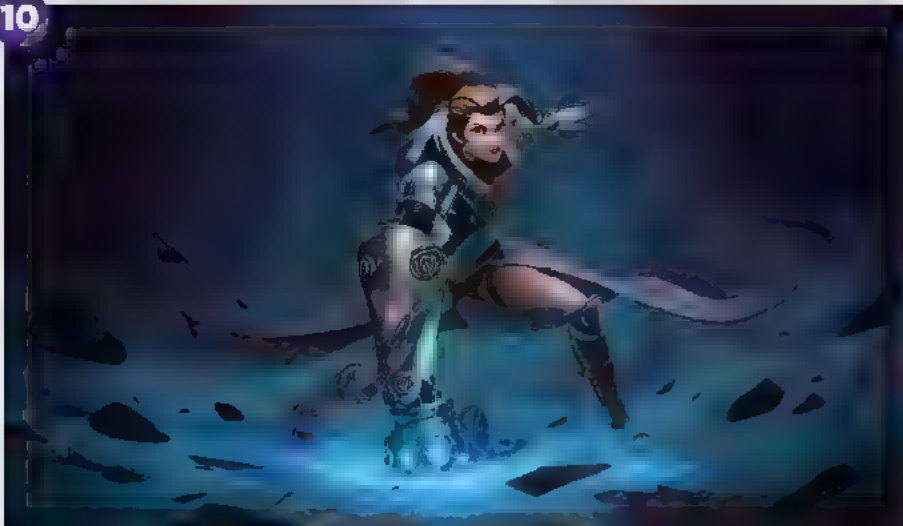
ANNA PAYLEEVA

9 MODERN VIKING

We strongly believe that studies from photos are great practice for artistic skills. This combination of a photo and a little inspiration leads to a modern Viking girl.



10

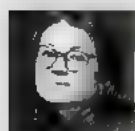


“We strongly believe studies from photos are great practice for artistic skills”

10 TEAM PIPELINE

This was a team project including the concept, 3D model, rig, composition and overpainting. We handle the whole pipeline through different parts of our team.

11



VERA RUDICHENKO

11 DARK DEEDS

Another example of how you create an interesting story from just a single photo! This gangster is definitely ready to do his dark deeds in the dead of night.

12



ANNA TANYGINA

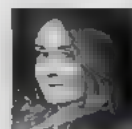
12 PHOTOREAL CREATION

We often do photorealistic projects in our studio, and a big reference base helps to speed up the work.

13



“This gangster is definitely ready to do his dark deeds”



IRINA SINYANSKAYA

13 REFERENCE DRAWING

Photos are good for more than just realistic illustrations. You can also capture a pose or idea and paint it in a cartoon style. The old Disney method still works.

14



15



ANDREY CHUMAK

14 CHARLIE THE PRODUCER

This whole set of feline expressions illustrates a producer of an art studio! Charlie the Producer, our producer's cat, is now a symbolic member of our management team. He also likes to talk with our clients!



EKATERINA REVAZASHVILI

15 DRUID DESIGN

A fantasy druid created for one of our internal projects. The key idea was to mix in some elements from nature.

Vela Games

LOCATION: Ireland

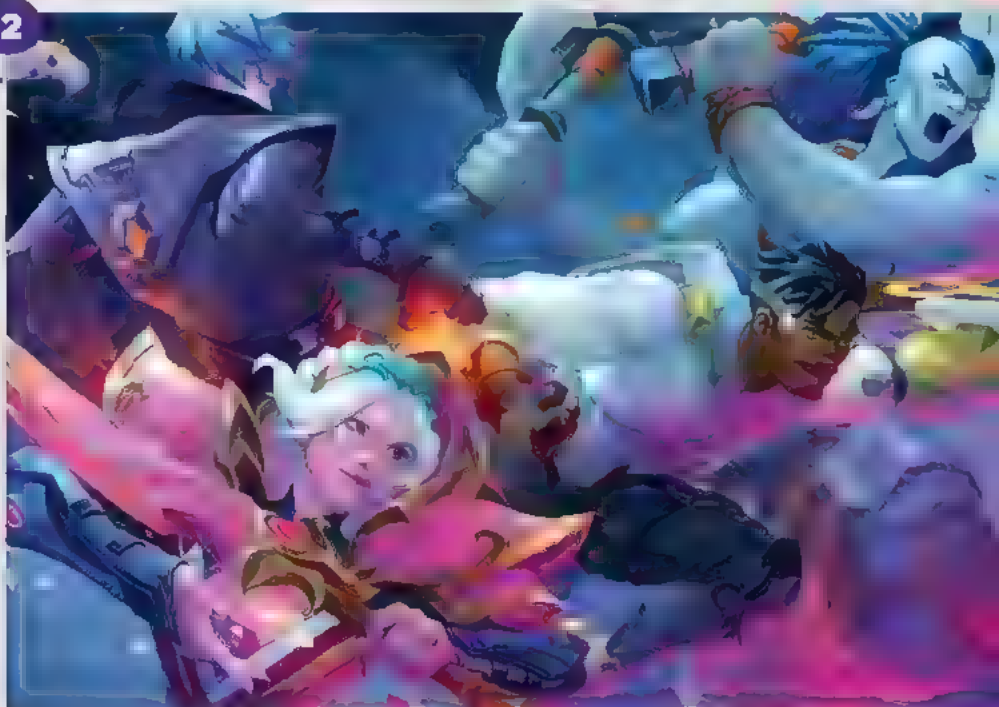
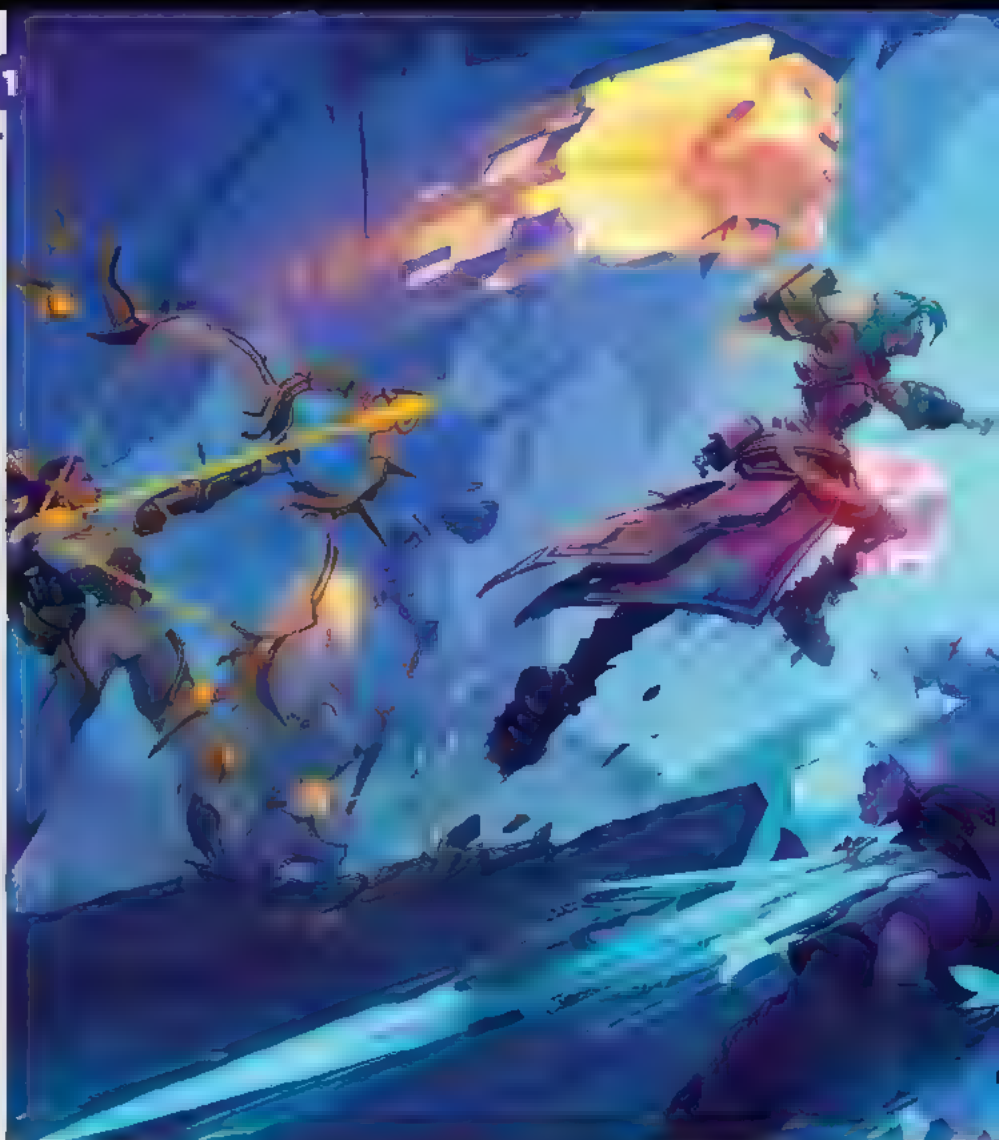
WEB: <https://evercoreheroes.com>

Vela Games is an independent video game development studio based in Dublin. It was founded in 2018 and is composed of a team of industry veterans from Electronic Arts, Riot Games, Blizzard Entertainment, and Epic Games; all developers with decades of experience playing pivotal roles in building multiplayer games experienced by millions of players around the world.

Founded by Travis George, Lisa Newon George and Brian Kaiser, the studio operates with a passion for creating innovative, player-first experiences driven by great gameplay, engaging IP, and vibrant communities.

Evercore Heroes, Vela's debut title, is a unique, competitive PvE game where players compete to prove they are the world's best team of heroes. Set in a rich, science fantasy world called Lumerea, the game breaks new ground by combining the real-time, skill-based action of MOBAs with the adventure of co-operative MMO dungeon runs.

Teams battle it out to avoid elimination by powering up heroes, charging their Evercore, and surviving challenging encounters. When the dust settles two teams remain, facing off in an epic head-to-head event to decide who has the best team of heroes.



“The studio operates with a passion for creating innovative, player-first experiences driven by gameplay”



BRUCE GLIDEWELL

1 WINTRESS FROSTWEAVER KEY ART
Two teams compete in Hardfrost Harbor against Wintress Frostweaver, an enraged, fearsome frost elemental spirit



ASTRI LOHNE

2 CLOSED BETA KEY ART
Battle-ready heroes Cynder, Riiva, Remy, and Lotus in the heart of the fight to defend the Evercore.

3 RIIVA CONCEPT ART
Wild, fearless, and driven by rage, Riiva is a formidable warrior from the Kru region



EVERCORE
HEROES



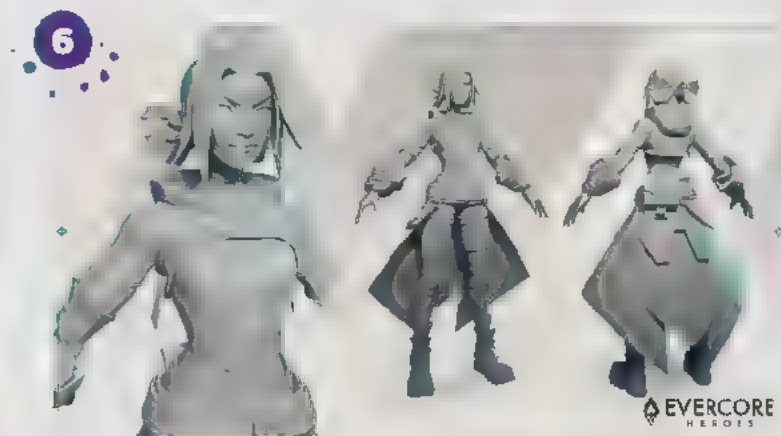
LEA BICHLMAIER

4 SYDIAN CONCEPT ART

Sydlan is a mage hailing from the night-cloaked region of Noktra, who channels and wields powerful corrupted magic.

5 ORIA KEY ART

An adventurous bombardier, Oria and her crew fearlessly sail to the far corners of Lumerea in search of magical artefacts.



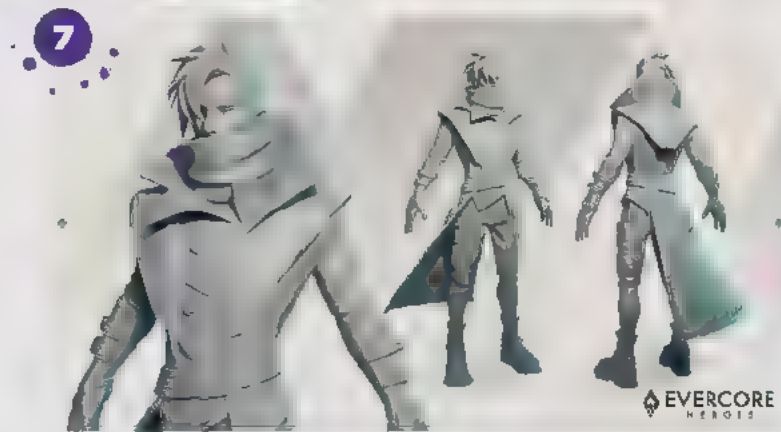
LAURA PELTOMÄKI

6 BLINK MODEL

Blink is a nimble fighter from the region of Moxy, who loves taking on challengers and punching through enemy packs

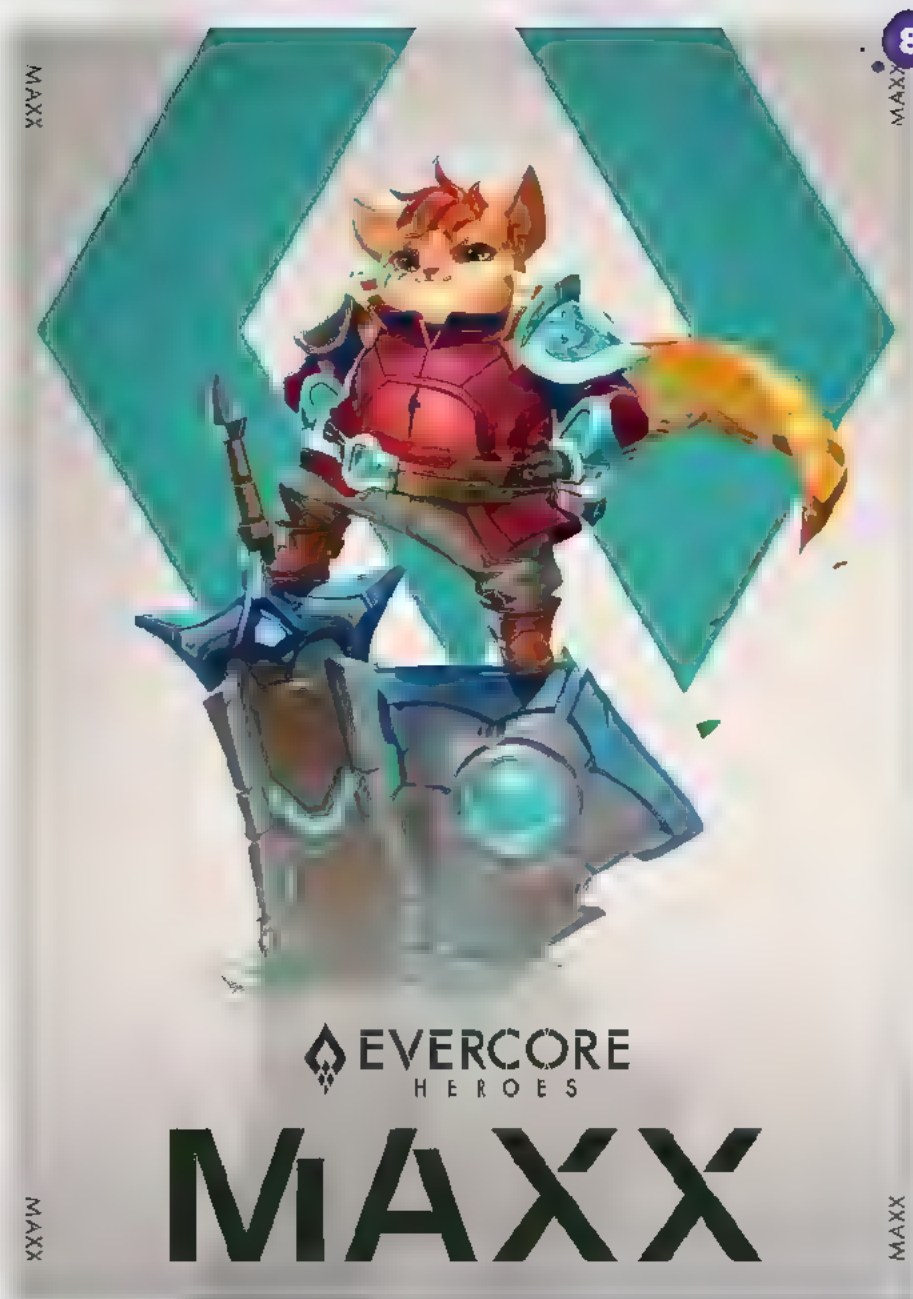
7 CYNDER MODEL

This is Cynder, a powerful fire mage from the dark corners of the cyberpunk region of Noktra





“Sydian is a mage who channels and wields powerful corrupted magic”



8

MAXX

MAXX

MAXX

MAXX



9



ABBY PARK

8 MAXX KEY ART

Maxx is a tiny, brave protector who switches between his human-sized sword and shield to defend his team

9 ACE CONCEPT ART

Ace is a bounty hunter from the science fiction region of Bios, who's always ready to help for the right price

EVERCORE
HEROES

Mooncolony

LOCATION: England
WEB: <https://mooncolony.co>

Mooncolony is a concept art and illustration studio situated in vibrant Cambridge, and was established by creative director Emrah Elmasli in 2016.

"We pride ourselves on providing premium 2D art and illustration services to video game developers across the globe, from free-to-play mobile games to AAA blockbusters," they say. "We set out to partner with the best studios globally and have had opportunities to work on amazing IPs such as Hearthstone, Diablo IV, Overwatch, World of Warcraft, Wayfinder, Clash Royale, Brawl Stars, Palia, The Elder Scrolls Online and more!

"Our tight-knit team drives our success, sharing a united passion, enthusiasm, and high standard for digital art. Decades of combined experience meet with a diverse range of talent and skills, which allows us to adapt to any project."



ALEX ALEXANDROV

1 DIABLO IV FAN ART

Even studios can create fan art! Alex made this in honour of the release of Blizzard's latest game, Diablo IV.

2 DRAGONFLIGHT: LEGACIES

We were entrusted to work on Blizzard's most iconic intellectual property, World of Warcraft, for the Dragonflight: Legacies mini-series. Alex was our lead artist.

1

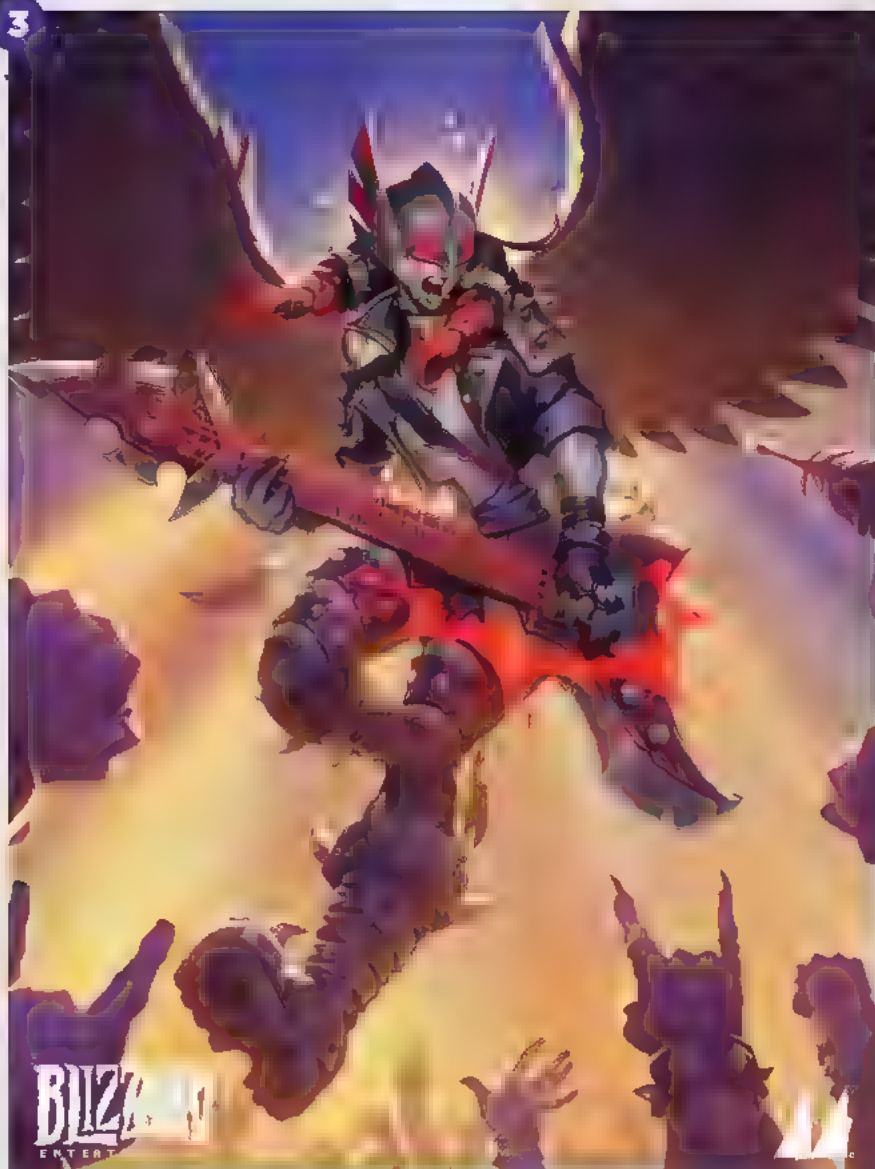


2





Blizzard Entertainment/Warcraft



Blizzard Entertainment/Hearthstone



ALEXANDRE LEONI

3 ROCK ANGEL ANNIHYLDE
Rock Angel Annihylde is a hero skin card from Hearthstone's Festival of Legends set. Alexandre has created many Hearthstone cards but says this one is his favourite (so far)!

4 PHYRESZ
Another Hearthstone card design. This was an entirely original character creation, based on the male version of this card. Alexandre enjoys bringing his characters to life with expressive faces.



Blizzard Entertainment/Hearthstone

“Our team drives our success, sharing a united passion”

Studio Focus



RAFAEL DE GUZMAN

5 ANGELIC PEGASUS RIDER - LEGENDARY: GAME OF HEROES

Raf loves variety, so this is his ideal project. Our character designs have covered a vast range of themes and genres, from Greek mythology to anthropomorphic creatures and celestial beings



Blizzard Entertainment Inc.



Blizzard Entertainment Inc.



EKATERINA SHAPOVALOVA

6 EELBOUND ARCHER

Ekaterina, also known as Rin, has been integral to Mooncolony's growth since she became the studio's first full-time artist. She has created and art directed countless Hearthstone illustrations, including this Eelbound Archer card.

7 SUNWELL NGUYEN

Sunwell Nguyen is a Hearthstone hero skin card illustrated by Rin. She is an expert in creating stylized illustrations and will soon lead a Mooncolony mentorship program to help aspiring artists



Blizzard Entertainment Inc.



MILICA ČELIKOVIĆ

8 PERSONAL PIECE: NIX THE ASTRONAUT

Mooncolony's Alexandre Leoni created a 'draw this in your style challenge' on our Discord server. Milica rose to the challenge and created this masterpiece.

9 IMPERIAL DEFENDER

Milica is well known for her creature and animal illustrations. This makes her the perfect artist for creating interesting characters such as this Imperial Defender card from Hearthstone.

INSTRUCTOR: JANA SCHIRMER



Next month in...
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX

GNOMON EXCLUSIVE

We speak with the pro artists at
The Gnomon Workshop to get the
details on their digital art courses



INSTRUCTOR: DAVE DORMAN

**Create a fierce
fantasy creature**
Emily Chapman
shows you how to
paint reality-based
creature artwork

**The world of
tabletop RPGs**
We delve into the
storytelling art
behind popular
games like D&D

**Learn how to
design robots**
DaCosta Bayley
shares techniques
for creating bots
with character

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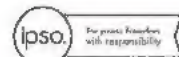
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HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



URGENT APPEAL



Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

Up to 100,000 children warehoused in Ukraine's vast orphanage system – a network of over 700 buildings – risk being forgotten. Left to face the dangers of war alone as staff flee. As families are torn apart or forced from their homes, many more children are at risk of being separated from the love and protection they desperately need. Worse still, they are at risk of trafficking, or being placed in overcrowded, understaffed and poorly resourced orphanages in border countries.

We must act now.

Born out of the Balkans conflict 30 years ago, we've championed the vital importance of family and community-based care of children and our teams are on the ground in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania to ensure this war does not rob children of the love and protection they need now more than ever. Across all three countries, we're directly supporting displaced families and unaccompanied children with material and emotional

support. We're working closely with authorities to keep families together when they are at their most vulnerable and to fight for the safe tracking, monitoring and care for children without parental care. And we won't stop when the fighting stops.

Will you help us by donating?

With your help, we can avert a child protection crisis of epic proportions and ensure children are protected and kept in families. Never orphanages.

To help protect vulnerable children, donate online at: www.hopeandhomes.org/donate. Or call **01722 790 111** Monday – Friday 9am – 5pm.

Please quote **FP22 - Tec** when making your donation.

In the event that funds raised exceed what is needed to deliver Hope and Homes for Children immediate and longer-term response to this crisis, we will use donations where the need is greatest.

HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN



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Tel	Email

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